Politics
of
Vision

Towards an Understanding of the Practices of the Visible and Invisible

Priscilla Netto

Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the PhD

Department of International Politics
University of Wales, Aberystwyth

September 2004

Contents

Acknowledgements

I owe a debt of gratitude to Jenny Edkins, who supervised this thesis and who offered her advice and encouragement throughout. Susan Carruthers supervised early parts of this work and Patrick Finney acted as second supervisor in the later stages of this work. I also owe a huge debt of thanks to Tarak Barkawi who has offered advice, encouragement and his friendship throughout.

Versions of parts of this work have been presented as conference papers and as a seminar paper in the UWA's International Politics Department's IPRS (International Politics Research Seminar). I would therefore like to thank a number of people who have been of assistance in terms of their invaluable comments and criticisms: Marysia Zalewski, Rob Walker, Vivienne Jabri, Stuart Elden, Veronique Pin-Fat, Maja Zehfuss, Liz Phillipose, Leslie Phillips, Debbie Lisle, Feng Xu, Jonathon Joseph, Nick, Rick, Mike Foley, Sue Ferguson and Annette Hoffman. A version of Chapter 3 has appeared in *The International Feminist Journal of Politics* and I would like to thank Marysia Zalewski again for her insightful comments and help in the publication of this article. A version of Chapter 4 is appearing as a book chapter and for this; I would like to thank Annette and Saskia of ASCA (Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis) for their detailed comments and support.

This work would also not have been possible without the financial assistance of the ESRC who provided a full studentship as well as financial support for the fieldwork in Singapore. I want to also thank Angela Wong of *The Substation* (Singapore) for her useful conversations. I would especially like to thank Lee Weng Choy of *The Substation* (Singapore) for all his help, illuminating conversations and support. Traslin Ong of *TheatreWorks* (Singapore) also deserves my thanks for giving me access to the archives of *TheatreWorks*. I want to also thank Pauline Phua of the National Archives of Singapore for her generous help. This work was made possible by the many patient librarians at the National Library of Singapore, the National University of Singapore, the National Library of Wales and the Hugh Owen Library of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

For their friendship and conversations, Huw Evans, Richard Morton, Karen, Jeppe Strasberg, Siwan, Annick Wibben, David Pinsent, Sian Nicholas, Mike and Danielle Young, and Alex.

For showing me a possible way of seeing-otherwise, I have gratitude for Richard Adamo, Danny Paradise, Louisa Sear and Steve of Byron Bay as well as Gosta and Patrick. To these people, I give my appreciation and affection.

Above all, this work is dedicated to Stephen Michael Mahoney for having infinite patience, love and humour, and for bringing balance to my life.

Lastly, to Terrence and Sally Netto as well as Patricia Netto – I owe them many obligations. Words will never suffice.

Abstract

The thesis explores the political dispositions lurking within the practices of vision, construed here in terms of the visible and invisible. It locates this investigation firstly, in the representational culture of colonial Singapore and secondly, in postcolonial Singaporean performances.

Although the thesis takes as its point of departure conceptualizations of the practices of vision by Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan, as the argument proceeds, the exploration takes its cue increasingly from the thought of Derrida. The chapters explore how the relationship to Otherness is variously effaced or enacted in practices of the visible and invisible.

The thesis starts with an exploration of the practices of the visible in colonial power relations and postcolonial multiculturalism, construed here as a metaphysical sovereign political disposition, the predicates of which are the theological-political securing of the I Am Who I AM. Within this relationship to Otherness is a violent ethico-political relation to Otherness. However, in the thought of Derrida and Levinas, the relationship between 'us' and the 'Other' is the condition of possibility for both the Self and Other, for justice, responsibility, associated by an openness to the Other, including the willingness to be unsettled by the surprise of the Other-to-come.

The second half of the thesis investigates the possibilities of a radical relation to the radically non-relational. Firstly, this radical relation to radical alterity is construed as encompassing a practice of the invisible, that of a poetics of the (im)possible. Secondly, this radical relation to Otherness is conceptualized as a 'writing in blindness', the counterpart of which is eschatological desire, accompanied by the 'art of the perhaps'.

Introduction

The goal of this present work is exploratory. It starts with the question: what is the politics of the gaze? Indeed, I was prompted to ask this question when I first encountered Fanon. However, in pursuing this question, questions concerning our disposition to Otherness also surface. All too often our practices of looking at Others are associated with the demand to identify, to secure identity and knowledge. For Foucault, the surveillant gaze is associated with the demand to secure knowledge and identity. This will to knowledge and power is, for Foucault, equated with the drive to dominate and master. While power relations are enacted in the surveillant gaze, what are equally enacted within this form of surveillance are efforts to distribute, to arrange, demarcate and secure knowable bodies in space. Indeed, what Foucault introduces is that the politics lurking within the practices of the surveillant gaze are suggestive of a politics of the visible by which surveillance produces definable and calculable subject positions. These practices of the visible, because they are bent on identity-securing practices, are co-extensive with the imposition of the known on the unknowable, often compelled by a desire to secure unconditioned certainty and the mastery of rational cognition.

Martin Jay (1994), among others, has put forward a compelling argument regarding the practices of vision. He suggests that Western culture is ocularcentric, that it is vision based and vision generated, dominated by vision and discourses of vision. According to Jay's critique of ocularcentrism, Western culture is characterized by a hegemony of vision that is instituted by, and reproduces in turn, the will to knowledge and a drive to dominate and master. Moreover, ocularcentrism, because it is a form of logocentrism, is intrinsically related to the metaphysics of presence, associated with the reduction of and the discrimination against Otherness in favour of the Same, variously understood as Logos, Being, Substance, Reason or Ego. According to this mode of thinking, metaphysical thought is related to forms of totalisation and to the politics of enframements. "Metaphysics," Derrida writes, "associates sight with knowledge [...] We give preference to sensing 'through the eyes' not only for the taking of action, but even when we have no praxis in view. This one sense, naturally theoretical and contemplative, goes beyond practical usefulness and provides more

to know than any other; indeed, it unveils countless differences. We give preference to sight just as we give preference to the uncovering of differences" (Derrida, 1983: 4). What is suggestive is the indication that the metaphysics of presence is encoded with ocularcentricism; and Derrida contests this encoding in Western discourses just as he contests all forms of logocentrisms, totalities and forms of enframements that are written under the spell of presence: '[A]ll the concepts by which *eidos* or *morphe* could be translated and determined refer back to the theme of *presence* in *general.* Form is presence itself. Formality is what is presented, visible, and conceivable of the thing in general [...] The metaphysical domination of the concept of form cannot fail to effectuate a certain subjection to the look' (Derrida, 1973: 108). Irigaray, too, has argued that the privileging of, and the practices of vision in Western culture are implicated in the perpetuation of a monological masculine subjectivity, a phallocentrism. She argues:

> Investment in the look is not as privileged in women as in men. More than any other sense, the eye objectifies as it masters. It sets at a distance, and maintains a distance. In our culture the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch and hearing has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations (quoted in Jay, 1994: 493)[1].

Equally, for Bhabha, this investment in the look is not as privileged in the colonized as in the colonizer. For Bhabha, the colonial surveillant gaze is co-related to the practices of the surveillance and the colonial scopic regime, practices which are intrinsically entwined with colonial relations of power and make colonial governmentality possible. Colonial power relations, as construed by Bhabha, are exercised not only in economic or territorial terms, but equally in the sphere of the colonial gaze that in turn (re)produces regimes of representational practices by which colonized subjects are made knowable and representable. As an identity-securing practice, this understanding of the gaze is suggestive of practices of visibility politics indicative of a political management and securing of forms of Otherness.

However, in wanting to explore this curiosity regarding the question of the politics lurking within the gaze, this thesis has, firstly, attempted to think through the

---

[1] Jay (1994) quotes Irigaray from an interview in *Les Femmes, la pornographie et l'erotisme*, eds Marie Francoise Hans and Gilles Lapouge (Paris, 1978).

practices of vision particularly in terms of the question of the politics underpinning the practices of the visible and the invisible. As the thesis will illustrate, the politics of visibility are homologous with practices that are often bent on subjection and imperialistic forms of mastery, associated with the desire to be and to know absolutely. The thesis proposes that these practices are all too often entwined with logocentric forms of sovereignty politics. But, underpinning this form of political disposition is a violent way of being with Otherness, and, as will be suggested, this way of being with Otherness is an impoverished form of politics. Thus, in pursuing the question of the politics lurking within the practices of the visible and invisible, what emerges is the other question, that of the relation to forms Otherness. The question of relating to forms of Otherness becomes the question of how we learn to live with Otherness. Indeed, while it started with Fanon's encounter with the gaze that enabled the initial point of departure, the thesis ends with exploring the political dispositions provoked by the practices of the visible and invisible, and the relation to Otherness opened up by these practices. So, in pursuing the question of the politics of the gaze, the thesis secondly seeks possibilities of being with Others, possible ways of thinking through a radical relation with the radical alterity opened up by Otherness. In short, if a politics of the visible is a form of securing and managing alterity, then what is the otherwise of this form of politics?

But let me start with how the question regarding the politics of the gaze emerged. The story of the thesis originally starts with Fanon. Indeed, the curiosity regarding the question of the political dispositions lurking within the practices of the visible and the invisible was set to work when I was confronted with Fanon's own encounter with the epistemic violence of the colonial gaze.

*

Because Fanon's agonal questions form the springboard for this thesis, I will start with a brief discussion of Fanon in order to locate the subsequent questions I explore. I want to emphasize however that this present work, given its parameters, is not about to attempt to provide an extensive critical interlocution of the thought of Fanon. This is beyond the scope of the thesis. However, I will briefly discuss the questions that my encounter with Fanon raises. But in raising these questions rather than providing any finite answers, my encounter with Fanon leads to more questions,

which provide me with further points of departure for my subsequent exploration of the practices of vision.

Let me begin with my identification with Fanon. Indeed, what spurred my initial interest and provided me with a critical point of departure was Fanon's understanding of the effects of colonial power relations on subject formations. By foregrounding the effects of colonial ideological formations on subject constitutions, otherness and difference, and the subsequent agonal search for an articulation of subjectivity, the search for freedom and the possibility of human being as a being of possibility to be, Fanon highlights the problematic of ontology that faces the colonized subject. Recall Fanon's plea in *Black Skin White Masks*, 'Oh my body, make me always a man [*sic*] who questions'.[2] For both the colonial and the ex-colonial postcolonial subject, the body is an embattled site of relations of power and practices of knowledge production. The colonized body is opened up to multiple territorialisations and re-territorialisations, to multiple discursive inclusive exclusions. The body, for the colonized subject, is the space upon which multiple and interrelated inscriptions of racial and gendered fears, fantasies and desires are written and re-written. Indeed, for the colonized subject, her body is not her own. As Fanon laments, the body of the colonized subject is overdetermined from without. Colonial power relations are inscribed onto the body; they inscribe and mark the body in terms of a racial epidermal schema and racial stereotypical discourses. Indeed, for the colonized subject, the self is alienated from him/herself, that is to say, the body of the colonized subject is inserted in between the seeing colonial 'Eye/I' of power and the seen of the body. For the colonized subject, the body is interpellated into the oppressive conditions of existing in a colonial world.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon foregrounds the relationship to forms of Otherness and the accompanying questions of living with and relating to differences. He charts the ways in which people (fail to) recognise others as they react to visible differences. Recall the moment when Fanon is made self-conscious of his difference.

---

[2] I must emphasize that given the confines of this thesis I will not delineate the problematic tensions of Fanon's gendered account implicit in his discussion of colonial power relations particularly the question of what happens when sexual difference intersects with the axes of racial difference. Suffice it to say that these tensions have been picked up on in numerous other occasions. See for example Sharpley-Whiting (1998), Doane (1991) and Fuss (1994).

Fanon's ontological shock of dislocation from his self was the result of the gaze emanating from an/Other. Up to this point, he had considered himself a French subject and more importantly, an equal to the White man. Yet a French child points to him and exclaims:

> Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile. "Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me. "Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. "Mama, see a Negro! I'm frightened!" Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all *historicity*, which I had learned about from Jaspers. Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train [...] I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by toms-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin' (Fanon, 1986: 111-112).

Such was the ontological shock of dislocation opened up by the gaze of an/Other, that, for Fanon, this gaze became imprisoning, a gaze in which his body was territorialised by colonial racial stereotypes and fears, inscribed with difference, a gaze by which he was 'othered', a gaze in which he was classified, made a seemingly knowable 'object': 'completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object [...] Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away?' (Fanon, 1986: 112-113).

Black Skin White Masks dramatizes the failure of Black subjectivity to live the options offered by White colonial modernity and the (im)possibility of realising freedom under conditions of racial domination. Captured and made seemingly knowable by the gaze of an/Other, Fanon finds himself caught by the colonial politics of the visible on account of the racial corporeal schema. Trapped within the gaze of an/Other, frozen within the racial stereotypes which envelope him, Fanon discovers that the Black man is *not.* Consequently, he also finds himself trapped within the binarised

choreography of the Manichean delirium of colonial power relations. Fanon goes on to highlight how the body of the colonized is made visible by the racial epidermal schema inscribed onto his body by the discursive practices of colonialism, how he is made visible and classifiable by his 'visible difference'. On account of this racial epidermal schema, his body is also enveloped by the racial stereotypes of fantasies and fears of colonialism. As Fanon highlights, 'I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiencies, fetishisms, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin"' (Fanon, 1986: 112). It is through the gaze of an Other that the colonised body is made visible and different on account of its visibly different 'colour'. Through the encounter with the colonial Other, the colonised body is made an 'Other' to the White world, a subject-formation that carries and embodies, at the same time, the burden of White colonialist racial fears, hatreds and fantasies: 'I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance [...] And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am *fixed*. [...] I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro!' (Fanon, 1986: 116).

What Fanon highlights is the inscription of racial difference onto the skin, that is, the production of a racial epidermal schema, namely an inscription of visible difference, of difference embodied and accompanied by racist stereotypical discourses. As Stuart Hall indicates, this production of the racial epidermal schema is an 'epidermalization: literally, the inscription of race on the skin [...] provides the black subject with [...] an alternative "corporeal schema" [that] is cultural and discursive, not genetic or physiological: "Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema [...] woven out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories"' (Hall, 1996: 16). As Hall argues, '"race" is not a genetic but social category. Racism is not a biological but a discursive regime [...] it is not the status of racist discourse as "scientific" but the fact that its elements function *discursively* which enables it to have "real effects"' (Hall, 1996: 21).

For the colonized subject, the 'real effects' of colonial stereotypical discourses have a physical impact on the subjectivity of the colonized in terms of their lived

experience where these racist colonial discourses are realized. Fanon identifies how the racial epidermal schema becomes a badge of visible difference and a sign of inferiority and otherness in a white-dominated colonial world. Colonial relations of power are worked through the colonial gaze in which the visibility of the racial epidermal schema is enacted, and by which bodies are graded according to their colour. Through the colonial production of the racial epidermal schema, the colonized subject is simultaneously inscribed as visible and invisible, both knowable and unknowable. As Bhabha (1997) suggests in *The Location of Culture*, the colonial body, notably the racial epidermal schema, is the site of an incessant repetition of colonial stereotypical discourses. The body of the colonized is simultaneously marked and erased by the encounter with the Other and carries the burden of colonial fears, fantasies and stereotypes: 'My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, re-coloured, clad in mourning in that White winter day' (Fanon, 1986: 113).

Black Skin White Masks foregrounds the ways in which the body is both constitutive of and yet inserted into colonial power relations. Yet, as was noted, Fanon allows us to understand how it is through the visibility of the racial epidermal schema that the colonized subject is simultaneously invisible, marked and yet erased within the epistemic violence inherent in the colonial gaze. On a very obvious level, Fanon highlights how the colonized subject is 'out of place'. What is being articulated is the relationship between the practices of the colonial gaze, colonial power relations and the effects they have on the colonized body-subject. The space of the colonized body-subject is mapped and territorialized by the modalities of identifications, colonial racial stereotypes and the flows of relations of power. Yet Fanon indicates the ambivalence of existing in a colonized space. The colonized person in French occupied Algeria is simultaneously 'in place' (as a colonial French subject) and yet also 'out of place' (as a Black colonized person having to exist in a White-occupied space). As such, for Fanon, and similarly for Bhabha, an ambivalence could be said to characterize the in-betweeness and the indeterminacy of the lived experience of the colonized person.

The body of the colonized subject is the zone of indistinction, the site of contrary and contradictory cathexis and overdetermination, the zone of permeability and of

negotiations between the external world as circumscribed by the gaze of the Other, of the traumatic inscriptions of racial difference and the constitution of the colonized body seen like another object, and the internal world of the psyche in which innumerable racist stereotypes and fantasies are implanted and introjected. These act as an internal foreign body lodged within the Self – a self who is always and already divided by the traumatic event of colonial inscriptions.[3] For the colonized subject, the agonal search for identity and subject-formation in terms of the self-representation of the 'I' is divided, incoherent, displaced and made impossible. As Bhabha indicates, the wider implication of this practice of vision, that of the epistemic violence inherent to the colonial gaze, is a displacement of and the discrimination against Otherness: '[F]rom within the metaphor of vision complicit with a Western metaphysic of Man emerges the displacement of the colonial relation [...] The White man's eyes break up the Black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed' (Bhabha, 1986: xii).

*

There are a number of significant questions Fanon has made available to me and which form the springboard for further questions I want to ask. Briefly, these questions concern the dynamics of visibility and the epistemic violence inherent to the practices of the colonial gaze and the political dispositions associated with these practices. By foregrounding the impossibility of mutual recognition and reciprocity in colonial relations, he foregrounds the question of community-formation. Lastly, Fanon foregrounds the tragic conditions of living in the colonial world, that is to say, in colonial relations: Black subjectivity is dis-located. As *Black Skin White Masks* indicates, the colonial encounter is a process of depersonalization. Within the Manichean delirium of the colonial encounter, the colonized subject is not; this is suggestive of an impoverished way of being with alterity and heterogeneity. Confronted by this violent and imperialistic way of being with and living with Otherness, I cannot help but ask: if the economy of the Same is dependent on the reduction and discrimination of Otherness, what then is the nature of this violence enacted via the disavowal of alterity and heterogeneity? As Derrida indicates, in this

---

[3] As Freud highlights, 'We must presume rather that the psychical trauma – or more precisely the memory of the trauma – acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work' (Freud, SE 2: 6).

relation between the Same and the Other, 'the same is a violent totality' (Derrida, 1978a: 119). If visibility politics is construed as an imperialistic, totalitarian way of securing Otherness, that of a calculative-representative mode of politics, then what is the otherwise of this form of politics? But let us turn now to the first question that Fanon's encounter with the colonial gaze raises for me.

What initiated my curiosity firstly was Fanon's foregrounding of the dynamics of the colonial gaze. From the above discussion, we see how the practices of the gaze of an/Other are entwined with colonial relations of power and the associated epistemic violence, how the subject caught within the gaze is simultaneously marked as visible and yet rendered invisible, in place and yet displaced. In short, I glimpse in Fanon how the dynamics of visibility and invisibility play a role in the colonial gaze, the counterpart of which is the subjection and discrimination of the colonized subject into an Other to the White colonial Man. I also glimpse in Fanon how the epistemic violence of that colonial gaze introduces non-reciprocity, that is, the Black colonized subject is frozen in the White colonial gaze. The colonized subject is not. For Fanon, mutual recognition between colonizer and colonized is impossible, a tragic farce that signals the impossibility for the Black subject to be. In Fanon, we see the tragic conditions of living in a colonial world and for the colonized subject: this is the impossibility of human being as having his/her possibility to be, the impossibility of having his/her right to be free as a human being. But I am also left with a curiosity to explore further the dynamics of the gaze and for the purpose here, I want to broaden this question of the gaze and consider instead the broader question of the practices of vision. For the purposes of Chapter 1, I begin this investigation of the practices of vision by returning to Bhabha. While Fanon was my first point of contact with the epistemic violence inherent to the colonial gaze, it is Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of the colonial gaze that provides me with a more useful point of departure for my subsequent attempts to think through the political dispositions lurking within the practices of vision. This is because Bhabha's mode of thinking the colonial gaze is conceptualized as an apparatus of relations of power and surveillance in the production of colonial subjectivities. This mode of theorizing the colonial gaze is itself encoded with the thought of Foucault and Lacan, and together with his account of spatiality, provides me with an opportunity to re-visit these continental thinkers who also include Lefebvre. In short, Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre

and Lacan provide me with a better point of departure to consider the practices of vision. With regard to Foucault, it is his account of the 'eye of power' that I explore, particularly its connections to relations of power. I turn to Lacan because Bhabha's conceptualization of the colonial gaze is partly indebted to his thought. But I also turn to Lacan because I do not think any exploration of the practices of the gaze cannot in the very least cast an eye in his direction. Lastly, I turn to Lefebvre because his account of spatiality places an emphasis on the relation of bodies to space. Lefebvre indicates that '[W]here there is space, there is being' (Lefebvre, 2000: 22). This interests me because both Bhabha and Lefebvre raise the question of colonial visibility politics and its relation to the politics of colonial spatial thought and colonial worlding. These are questions I take up in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 2, while I explore the visibility politics lurking within colonial spatial thought and colonial worlding, I consider the counterpart of that visibility politics, namely the political disposition lurking within it. In his discussion of Fanon, Bhabha indicates that vision is complicit with the Western metaphysic of Man. In other words, the production of Western Man is made possible by the displacement of the colonial relation. I am curious about this and want to explore it further. Inherent to colonial relations of power is the obliging of the native to take the place of the Other on his/her own home ground, the counterpart of which is the consolidation of the alien, the colonial European Man, as sovereign and master of colonized space. As a result of colonial relations of power, Fanon is made to feel out of place, un-homely, a stranger in his own space. As Bhabha indicates in his process of remembering Fanon, "[T]his process is visible in that exchange of looks between native and settler that structures their psychic relation in the paranoid fantasy of boundless possession and its familiar language of reversal: 'when their glances meet he [the settler] ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, "They want to take our place". It is true for there is no native who does not dream at least of setting himself up in the settler's place'" (Bhabha, 1986: xv). But what I want to know and explore instead is the political disposition, the political subjectivity opened up in this process of colonial worlding. What is the political disposition lurking within colonial visibility politics? These are the questions I explore in Chapter 2. I locate these questions in colonial Singapore. While Chapter 1 is mainly an exploration of various modes of thinking the practices of vision as construed by Bhabha, Foucault, Lacan and Lefebvre, I turn to

Singaporean material because a biographical locatedness gives me a better sense of the historical canvas with which to explore questions regarding the practices of colonial visibility politics. I turn to Singaporean material because of the diverse forms of identity-securing practices in colonial and postcolonial Singapore. In Chapter 2, in order to explore these questions regarding the politics of the visible and the political subjectivity underpinning colonial spatial thought, I turn to colonial representational practices. In doing so, I glimpse a form of visibility politics in materials such as colonial photographs and colonial travel narratives. In these travel narratives and photographs, I encounter a visibility politics set to work by colonial stereotypical discourses. As I suggest, underlying the colonial stereotype is a visibility politics whereby the relationship between the seer and the seen is the imposition of a compulsory epistemic certainty. As a way of securing the insecurable alterity of Otherness, visibility politics, as I will discuss, is an impoverished way of being with Otherness.

But I ask myself, surely this question of visibility politics is not solely confined to colonial relations? Indeed, in postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism, itself a legacy of colonial divide-and-rule practices, I find another form of visibility politics. This leads me on to Chapter 3 where I explore visibility politics in postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism which I suggest could be construed as a multicultural-politics-as-containment-of-difference. While this exploration was made possible by my initial exploration of visibility politics in colonial Singapore, it is partly indebted to Fanon's. With regard to the questions of reciprocity and mutual recognition, *Black Skin White Masks* raises the questions of the community of the 'We' and the processes of identification, the question of the (in)hospitality accorded to the stranger, the alien and the colonized Other. Fanon foregrounds this question of reciprocity, of the (im)possibility of mutual recognition in colonial relations. This question of recognition is linked to the question of community-formation, which is associated with processes of identifications, dis-identifications and the politics of exclusions. As Rey Chow indicates in her discussion of Fanon, the question of recognition is tied to the politics of admittance: 'the articulation of commonality and consensus; a community is always based on a kind of collective inclusion [...] At the same time, however, there is no community formation without the implicit understanding of who is and who is not to be admitted. As the principle that regulates

community formation, admittance operates in several crucial senses [...] The person who is or is not admitted bears on him or her the marks of a group in articulation' (Chow, 1998: 56). This question of community is one pursued by Derrida. I go into this in more detail in Chapter 3 but here suffice it to say that for Derrida, the question of community is one he is suspicious of as it is also a question of communal self-protection, the mark of which is various processes of closure by which a community of the 'We' builds up walls of defenses against forms of Otherness. For Derrida, the question of the 'We' is linked to the way 'We' relate to and manage forms of Otherness: '[A]s with the delimitation of any place of dwelling, the constitution of a people, a nation, a state, or a democracy necessarily specifies who is estranged from that identity, place, or regime. The very act of delimitation itself does not dispense, of course, with the stranger. For the limit or boundary [...] is what actually brings the native and stranger together as well' (Dillon, 1999: 119). In Chapter 3, I take up this question of the community of the 'We' by firstly discussing the visibility politics of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism. I suggest that the community-securing practice inherent to postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism is one that organizes and divides Singaporean people into knowable and racially defined groupings in a panoptic field of vision for the state management of difference. As a form of management-as-containment-of-difference, I suggest that Singaporean multiculturalism cannot acknowledge difference in the sense of incommensurability-vision and the enactment of the undecidable.

However, as will become clear, this form of thinking the community of the 'We' does not exist without contestation. I suggest that this multicultural community-formation of the 'We' is contested in intercultural performances, for example, in the process-base intercultural practice of TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*. Confronted by *Desdemona*'s intercultural performance, I ask what is the ethic put into play in this representational space? In *Desdemona*'s performance-as-critique, I detect an aspect of the politics of the invisible, that of poetics and the performance of the inoperative community. By performing the inoperative community, *Desdemona* introduces an apophaticism of poetics, which is aligned to the refusal of the proper name of the 'I' and the 'We'. By performing the 'community of the question', *Desdemona* suggests that the question of the community of the 'We' is better preserved as an open-ended question. In other words, what is suggestive in *Desdemona* is that the question of whether to be or not

to be, although valid, is not entirely the question. What it is equally valid to raise is the desire to seek an otherwise, introduced by the apophaticism of poetics.

Lastly, while Fanon's encounter with the colonial gaze formed the initial point of departure and located my curiosity to explore further the epistemic violence inherent in the practices of the colonial gaze, crucially, he also raises the question of seeking a radical relation of being with Otherness. By foregrounding the shock of dislocation when he experiences the epistemic violence inherent in the gaze of an/Other, Fanon highlights how the (social) mirror is particularly crucial for subject-formation. Recognition is important, critical even, because the effort to generate and secure identity can fail. We are made keenly aware of the shame and shock that Fanon feels when the social mirror reflects back to him an image that is degrading and humiliating. More often than not, the image that is reflected back assists in the mediation of the Self and the Other. Indeed, the Self is constituted by its relationships with Other(s). Moreover, most ideas of identity and self-representation argue that subjectivity is always mediated through and by others. The Self only signifies because of the signifying presence of an Other and the Other is constituted by and in the Symbolic order. In this sense, identity is a matter of social recognition. However, it is also important to note that this recognition could also be a mis-recognition, or in Lacan's terms, a *mesconnaissance*. We have only to look towards Fanon to understand the sense of alienation, namely, the ontological shock of dislocation felt by the colonized subject. In Fanon, we see how this articulation of the colonized condition, of Black colonized subjectivity, on the basis of Self-Other relations fails. *Black Skin White Masks* asks the question as to whether there can ever be reciprocity between Whites and Blacks. Are the dynamics of mutual recognition possible? For Fanon, within the context of colonial relations of power, the answer to this question is a resounding 'no'. For me, Self-Other relations as they are foregrounded in the relations between the colonized and colonizer raises the question of this relation to the Other. For me, suggested by these relations is the emergence of the Other, an emergence that poses the question of the ethical relation to Otherness, and it is a relation that fails in *Black Skin White Masks*. As Derrida and Levinas have constantly indicated, this relation to the Other is the context of the political and ethical, the site of an irreducible responsibility, and yet it is in the relationship to Otherness that responsibility and justice are often suppressed or

effaced by violence. Both thinkers share the view that justice demands redressing the balance so as to arrive at a more ethical and responsible appreciation of Otherness. Such an appreciation reminds us that the stranger, the foreigner, the alien before 'us' always escape the self-certifying egological 'I'. An openness to the Other, for Derrida, is an opening of a radical relation to the alterity of Otherness beyond the Same. For Derrida, the question of living with and opening to an Otherness establishes a summons to absolute hospitality and responsibility, a requirement of justice demanded by Otherness. For Levinas, this relation to an Otherness beyond the Same also establishes infinite responsibility. Again, I am forced to return to the question I asked earlier, if a politics of the visible is form of securing and managing alterity, if a politics of a visible is a form of discriminating against Otherness, then what is the otherwise of this form of politics? In Chapter 4, I return to this question and I locate it again in Singapore. I suggest that this otherwise of a politics of the visible is that of a 'writing in blindness', the counterpart of which is taking up the challenge of the 'art of the perhaps'. Here, I take my cue from Derrida to suggest that as a form of 'writing in blindness', the eschatological desire and openness to Otherness is a responsibility and response that Otherness insists on. To better think through this response, this relation opened up by the challenge posed by radical alterity, I conduct a politically disposed reading of TheatreWorks' performance of *Lear*. This reading practice takes its cue from the deconstructive thought of Derrida. Such a reading practice modestly aspires to an ethical reading practice called for and opened up by the Other. By a politically disposed reading practice, I am indicating the engagement and negotiation with the Other in non-essential, non-violent terms, an ethical stance that makes room for the Other to exist in all its Otherness.

*

To sum up, what I have discussed so far are the questions that are opened up in my encounter with Fanon's own encounter with the colonial gaze, questions that form the subterranean undercurrent for subsequent questions in the following chapters. In what follows, I will outline in more detail how I address these questions in the thesis, and relate this to earlier work. In Chapter 1, I continue to ask: What are the practices of vision? As was indicated, in that chapter, I broaden out this question to consider the mode of thinking the practices of the gaze as conceptualized by Bhabha, Foucault, Lacan and Lefebvre. This enables me to understand the practices of vision

as encompassing the practices of the visible and invisible. But to further explore the practices of the visible and the political disposition opened up by these practices, in Chapter 2 I locate this investigation in colonial Singapore. I do this in part because my Singaporean background gives me a better sense of the historical canvas and the forms of identity-securing practices in both colonial and postcolonial Singapore. In Chapter 2, my curiosity regarding the politics of colonial visibility practices takes me to colonial photographs and colonial travel narratives. In the main, scholarly analyses of colonial Singapore have concentrated on uncovering colonial stereotypical discourses in colonial literature and colonial travel narratives. For example, colonial discourse analyses have foregrounded and uncovered how stereotypes such as 'the lazy Malay' or the 'drug sodden Chinaman' are played out in these colonial representational practices.[4] But, for the purposes here, what I want to know is this: what are the visibility politics played out in these stereotypical discourses? What is the political subjectivity opened up and introduced in these representational practices? In these representational practices, I detect a form of visibility politics which is set to work by colonial stereotypical discourses. A form of colonial worlding is set to work by colonial spatial thought. I will not go into much detail here but suffice it to say in brief that the form of worlding, the political subjectivity opened up by this process of worlding, is that of a metaphysical sovereign politics that partakes in the imperial identity formula of the I Am Who I Am. As a form of political disposition, this is an impoverished way of being with Otherness.

However, I suspect that visibility politics are not mainly confined to colonial Singapore. In Chapter 3, I explore another form of visibility politics, that is to say, postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism which, I suggest, takes the form of a containment and management of alterity, even as alterity is disavowed. I suggest that as a form of politics, this form of multiculturalism partakes in a community formation and securing of the knowable 'We' which is also the disavowal of the undecidable. However, it is in the representational spaces of postcolonial Singaporean intercultural performances that I detect practices of resistances to this community-securing practice of the 'We' of the multicultural community. In this

---

[4] See for example, Alatas (1977) 'The Myth of the Lazy Malay', Trocki (1990) 'Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore' and Warren (1986) 'Rickshaw Coolie: A People's history of Singapore'.

chapter, I ask: what is the ethic put into play by TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*? As a practice of the invisible, I suggest that what is put into play is the incommensurability-vision of poetics, and what is subsequently provoked by the poetics TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* is the inoperative community. The poetics of *Desdemona*, I suggest, can be read as a radical relation with the radically non-relational, a radical relation opened up and introduced by the inoperative community. Now, why do I choose to explore Singaporean performances? Briefly, where Chapter 3 diverges from other scholarly analyses in/on Singapore is that while a significant body of work exists in terms of critiques of Singaporean multiculturalism, these critiques have concentrated in the main on questions of national identity and Asian values.[5] In addition, some of these sociological and political analyses have also crucially highlighted and called for the recognition of the ways in which Singaporean multiculturalism is a legacy of British colonial-divide-and-rule racial practices.[6] But what I want to know, which has not been really contested in these analyses, is the question of the community-formation of the 'We'. What I am asking instead is what is the otherwise of this community-securing practice? Is it possible to think the otherwise of this form of community-securing practice? As will be discussed in Chapter 3, as a form of community-securing practice, Singaporean multiculturalism is a form of containment and management of alterity and heterogeneity, which is the opposite of the community that Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy speak of. I ask myself, do any critiques of the multicultural community exist in Singapore? In the representational spaces of Singaporean intercultural performance, I glimpse a performance-as-critique of this community-securing practice. As indicated, confronted by *Desdemona*, I ask what ethic is put into play. Chapter 3 represents this exploration.

In pursuing this question of the politics lurking within the practices of the visible and invisible, what also emerges is the other question, the question of the relation to forms Otherness. This question of relating to forms of Otherness has become the question of how we learn to live with and be with the Other and forms of Otherness. So, in pursuing the question of the politics of vision, the thesis also seeks possible

---

[5] See for example the work of Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat (2000) 'Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues', Chua (2000a) 'Singaporeans ingesting McDonalds', Chua (1998) 'Racial Singaporeans: Absence After the Hyphen' and Kahn (1998) 'Southeast Asian Identities'.

[6] See for example the work of Ien Ang and John Stratton (1995) 'The Singaporean Way of Multiculturalism' and Ang and Stratton (1995a) 'Straddling East and West'.

ways of thinking through a radical relation with the radical alterity opened up by Otherness. In short, if a politics of the visible is a form of securing and managing alterity, then what is the otherwise of this form of politics? While I suggest in Chapter 3 that one approach is that of an apophaticism of poetics, in Chapter 4, I suggest that another way of construing this relation to Otherness, of approaching the radical alterity of the Other, is a 'writing in blindness' and the associated politics of the undecidable called forth by this writing in blindness.

I approach this mode of thinking by conducting a politically disposed reading practice of TheatreWorks' performance of *Lear*. I turn to a TheatreWorks performance again because, as a performance-as-critical-thought in its own right, *Lear* exemplifies the concerns of postcoloniality, placing in the foreground the problematics that postcolonial theorists have delineated. Questions such as identity, subjectivity, belongingness, community, sexuality have always surfaced in these performances. More than any other spaces, performances in Singapore have foregrounded an active dialogue with these concerns and what is also witnessed in these representational spaces is the process and the work of agonistic subjectivity in performance, spaces that foreground the possibilities of knowing and imagining both ourselves and otherness differently. It was an encounter with the ineffable silence of the Younger Daughter in *Lear* that was to become the deciding factor with which to locate my curiosity for an otherwise of the politics of the visible. Critics and opponents of TheatreWorks intercultural process-based performances have often argued for more legible and easily decipherable performances. Critical responses to these intercultural performances have veered between incomprehension and anger.[7] A constant criticism of TheatreWorks performances is that of 'chaotic indecipherability' and this desire for easy readability is nowhere better exemplified than by the challenge posed by Silent Younger Daughter in TheatreWorks *Lear* who locates both this desire for, and the subsequent difficulty of, ready-made comprehension. The Silent Younger Daughter in *Lear* resists easy reading but she nevertheless provokes the critical desire for reading and ready-made comprehension. In Chapter 4, on encountering the radical alterity posed by her silence, I ask instead: what if those silences articulate a form of politics, that of a resistance, and diminishment, of both perceptual faith and the interpretive drive and

[7] See for example Grehan (2001) 'TheatreWorks Desdemona: Fusing Technology and Tradition'.

will to knowledge? So, instead of trying to 'read' her silence, I consider instead the wider political implications posed to reading by the Silent Younger Daughter's indecipherability.

In Chapter 4, I consider, in short, the challenge posed to reading, and the subsequent challenge of relating to Otherness, when I am confronted by the indecipherable silence posed by the Younger Daughter in *Lear*. How do we read and respond to Otherness, when the only adequate response is the acknowledgement that we can never respond to the Other adequately? Would not the comprehensibility of the Other relieve the Other of his/her/its alterity? Is not the Other, in its Otherness, the one whom one is precisely ill-equipped to read, comprehend or respond to? In short, how do we respond to Otherness if we want to avoid the political disposition of ontological totalitarianism? In Chapter 4, I suggest that a possible way of approaching the radical alterity posed by forms of Otherness is that of a writing in blindness. *Lear* represents the lever of intervention with which to consider the political disposition called forth and opened up by an encounter with ineffable Otherness. This chapter represents the exploration of an otherwise of the politics of the visible and in *Lear*, I am returned again to the question of learning to live, of seeking possible ways of being with the Other and forms of Otherness which I suggest could be approached by a writing in blindness.

*

The thesis starts with the question: what is the politics of the gaze? The question was made possible by my encounter with Fanon's experience of the epistemic violence of the colonial gaze. But the question regarding the gaze becomes a question of the political disposition lurking within the practices of vision, construed in the thesis as encompassing the practices of the visible and invisible. In pursuing these questions of the politics of the visible and invisible, the other question emerges – that of the relation to forms of Otherness. The thesis locates the exploration of these questions in colonial and postcolonial Singapore. It suggests that, in terms of the relation to Otherness, the political disposition of visibility politics discloses a violent way of being with Otherness, one which could be described as the securing of sovereign I Am Who I Am. Consequently, if a politics of the visible is a form of securing and managing the Other's otherness, which is a violent ethico-political way

of being with Otherness, what then is the otherwise of this form politics? I return again to this question later in the thesis. But here, suffice it to say that this otherwise of visibility politics takes the form of a radical relation with the radically non-relational. Firstly, this radical relation to Otherness encompasses a poetics of the (im)possible. Secondly, this radical relation to Otherness takes the form of eschatological desire, a radical openness to the Other-to-come, and the opposite of the ontological totalitarianism of visibility politics. Such a politics, that of eschatological desire and openness to the Other's otherness, is made possible by a writing in blindness, accompanied by the 'art of the perhaps'.

Chapter 1

Toward an understanding of the Practices of Vision

> What is at stake, first of all, is an adventure in vision.
>
> Jacques Derrida

Introduction

The objective of this chapter is simply stated. For the purpose here, I want to broaden the question concerning the politics of the gaze to consider the following: what are the practices of vision? In pursuing this question, as will soon be clear in this and subsequent chapters, the question regarding the practices of vision becomes a question of the political disposition underpinning the practices of the visible and invisible.

To better enable thinking through the practices of vision, I draw from continental philosophical thinking and postcolonial theorists informed by such a thinking. Specifically, in this chapter, I propose to look at, albeit briefly, Bhabha, Foucault, Lacan and Lefebvre. I do this because these thinkers form the productive point of departure to explore the practices of vision in the following chapters. Although seemingly contradictory and disparate, perhaps even on occasion antagonistic bedfellows, these thinkers allow me a point of introduction to the practices of vision and its entwinement with spatiality and subjectivity. That is to say, the point of convergence between these thinkers is that of a critique and conceptualisation of vision, of space and its entwinement with subjectivity.

While these thinkers inform my exploration of the practices of vision in this chapter, from Chapter 2 onwards, I take my cue increasingly from Derrida's deconstructive ethos. However, while I draw predominantly from Derrida to inform my reading of the political dispositions underpinning the practices of the visible and invisible in the next three chapters, also lurking within those chapters' exploration of the politics of vision

are Bhabha, Foucault and Lefebvre, to which my enquiries are indebted. In short, while these thinkers help me approach an understanding of the practices of vision in this chapter, they also serve a springboard to consider the practices of vision, of subjectivity and spatiality in subsequent chapters. Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan thus enable me to broaden out my exploration, one which attempts to think through the political disposition underpinning the practices of the visible and invisible. In addition, I want to emphasize that this chapter and the following chapters are not going to attempt a sustained critique of Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre or Lacan. That is not the goal of the thesis as a whole. Rather, these thinkers form both the productive points of departure and the undercurrent of my thinking through the practices of the visible and invisible in the next three chapters.

I am mindful of course that by concentrating solely on these thinkers in this chapter, I am making a critical judgement which focuses on certain texts, themes and thinkers to the exclusion of others. I am also mindful that in making these decisions and thus drawing the parameters for this current exploration into the practices of vision, I am enacting a form of closure. I therefore acknowledge that the decisions I have taken will always have a partial and contestable character and that these decisions stand in an uneasy relation to the undecidable. But as Derrida has taught us, one has to make decisions: 'absolute urgency [...] is the law of decision' (Derrida, 1997: 79). For Derrida, this is the undecidability of the decision that accompanies every act of reading and which also accompanies the choices made here in this chapter.

So, why have I chosen to focus on these thinkers? As indicated, I do so because these thinkers have put forward varying conceptualisations of practices of vision, each one strategically deploying their own optical vocabulary and in turn exemplifying in their own separate accounts different ways of locating a critique of the practices of vision. For the purpose here, it is the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha who provides the springboard from which I move on to Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan. Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of the colonial gaze as an apparatus of relations of power and surveillance in the production of colonial subjectivities provides me with the critical point of entry in my attempt to think through the practice of vision in this chapter. But Homi Bhabha's mode of thinking the colonial gaze, itself encoded by his re-reading of Foucault and Lacan, and his understanding of

spatiality, also provides me with an opportunity to re-visit these continental thinkers. With regard to Foucault, it is his conceptualisation of the 'eye of power' that I explore particularly its connections to relations of power. In Foucault's account, the gaze is often bound up with relations of power that are related to administrative extensions that subject and consign the objects of this gaze to a visibility, to a subject of knowledge. The discussion in this chapter will concentrate firstly on the imbrication of vision in Foucault's conceptualisation of space, power and knowledge. But in my discussion of Foucault, I also briefly mention his account of heterotopias. I do this because in Chapter 3 I explore more fully the affirmative potential of these heterotopic spaces through a reading of a postcolonial Singaporean performance, namely TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*.

In the sections on Lefebvre, the reading that I propose is intended to reflect on Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (2000) placing particular emphasis on the relation of bodies to space. I do this in order to set the context of the following chapters where I reflect on colonial representations of space and the politics lurking within colonial worlding (Chapter 2) and the apophaticism of poetics underpinning the affirmative potential of *Desdemona*'s representational space (Chapter 3). Thus, the section on Lefebvre in this chapter proceeds from a brief discussion of Lefebvre's trialectics of space. Next, I will discuss broadly how Lefebvre's thinking of space makes available to me a thinking about the body in/as space. But this attempt to think through the body in/as space also makes available a preliminary exploration of what I will refer to here as a worlding of the body-subject. It has to be emphasised here that this discussion of Lefebvre will not seek to develop a comprehensive critique of Lefebvre's theorisation of the production of space. Nor will it follow the route already set down by other scholars who have sought to elaborate his Marxian analysis of the production of space.[1] Lastly, I will look at Lacan briefly. I do this because I do not think any critical assessment of the practices of vision cannot proceed without casting a glance in Lacan's direction, even if one were to move in another theoretical direction with regards to exploring the politics of the visible and invisible.

---

[1] See for example, Harvey (1989).

Bhabha: the colonial gaze

Why have I chosen to start my exploration into the practices of vision through the prism of Bhabha's theoretical work? While Fanon compels one to explore the politics of the gaze, it is also Bhabha who informs the other critical point of departure in this present work. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha raises some of the questions pertinent to this current exploration, particularly the question of power and knowledge, including spatiality and subjectivity. Bhabha is also pertinent within the context of postcoloniality especially in terms of how subject-formations and identity-constructions have to be grappled with within the legacy of colonial history and the present demands of postcoloniality. But for the purpose here, I concentrate on Bhabha's theorisation of the colonial gaze.

Crucially, for me, the introductory chapter to *Locations of Culture*, entitled 'Locations of culture', starts with an epigraph from Heidegger: '[A] boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which *something begins its presencing*' (quoted in Bhabha, 1997: 1). While Bhabha immediately proceeds to situate this thinking about the border in terms of the 'Beyond', this thinking about the border also situates his thinking with regard to the processes of colonial discourses, its institutionalisation and policing of boundaries between the European Self and the colonised 'other', its association with the processes of exclusions, and the possibilities of intervention into the colonial processes of representation, power relations and subjectivity. Indeed, his methodology, which is colonial discourse analysis, informed by a reading of continental thinkers, is one that attempts to locate the possibilities of resistances to the colonial processes of 'othering'. Similarly to the postcolonial critics Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, Bhabha's analysis of colonial power relations is indebted to Foucault, Lacan and Derrida, to name a few of the continental thinkers they draw on. Similarly to Spivak and Said, Bhabha's colonial discourse analysis emphasises how the will to know and understand the non-Western 'other' is inseparable from the will to power and knowledge. And also similarly to Spivak, Bhabha proceeds from the acknowledgement that imperialism was not only a territorial and economic exploitation but, inevitably, a subject-constituting project.[2]

---

[2] Here, I want to acknowledge that the term 'postcolonial/postcolonialism/postcoloniality' is a term that has been widely used to signify the political, cultural and linguistic experiences of societies that were

For Edward Said (1978), for example, Western colonial power over the non-Western, 'Oriental' world is maintained in and through the discourses of art, humanities and social sciences, as well as through more direct forms of domination such as political rule and military repression. As Robert Young explains,

> Said's deployment of the concept of a 'discourse' for his analysis of Orientalism enabled him to demonstrate a consistent discursive register for particular perceptions, vocabularies and modes of representation common to a wide variety of texts extending across the humanities and social sciences – from travel accounts to history, from literature to racial theory, from economics to autobiography, from philosophy to linguistics. All these texts could be analysed as sharing a consistent colonial ideology in their language as well as their subject matter, a form of knowledge that was developed simultaneously with its deployment and utilization in a structure of power, namely colonial domination (Young, 2001: 388).

---

former colonies. Although the study of the effects of colonial representation are central to the work of postcolonial critics, the term 'postcolonial', from the beginning, has also been a site of disciplinary and interpretative contestation. The heavy continental influences of the major exponents of colonial discourse theory, for example Said (Foucault), Homi Bhabha (Lacan, Foucault and Derrida) and Gayatri Spivak (Derrida and Lacan) have led critics to argue, incorrectly in my view, that these theorists are solely concerned with textuality while ignoring the material effects of violences instituted by colonialism (Ahmad, 1995; Ashcroft, 1989). But this is in itself a reductive understanding of continental thinkers as it relates to postcolonial analysis and to political analyses. One has only to turn to Derrida, for example, and his formative experiences as a French Algerian to note that his deconstruction of the Western metaphysics of presence is also chiasmically entwined with his (equal) concern for the ethical relation to the Other and to forms of otherness, to his thinking through the idea of Justice, friendship, forgiveness and the community to realise that his work is always already concerned with the political. My position on postcolonial methodology thus comes closest to these continental influenced postcolonial theorists, i.e. Bhabha's and Spivak's bricolage methodology. The prefix 'post' in postcolonialism has also attracted vigorous debates with some arguing that the 'post' indicates the 'after' of colonialism, i.e. post-independence while others have suggested that its methodology is more akin to postmodernism and therefore co-opted by Western theoretical and methodological models (see for example, Ahmad, 1995). Additionally, debates have also focused on the potentially homogenising effect of postcolonial theory (Chrisman and Williams, 1993) and which leads to the possibility of eliding differences between cultures and the varieties of colonial postcolonial experiences. However, while these debates continue, it has become increasingly clear that postcolonial studies and theorisation cover all cultures that have been affected by the processes of colonialism and this includes both Western and non-Western societies and cultures, arriving at a more elaborate understanding of the workings of power relations, ideological practices and subjectivity in both colonial and postcolonial cultures. This particular understanding of postcolonialism stresses the articulations of relations of power and the discursive effects of imperialist representational practices on institutional practices, the articulations between and across politically defined historical periods, colonial and post-independence cultures and the responses to these practices on the part of colonised and postcolonial peoples (Young, 1990). See also for example, Robert Young's (1990) position on postcolonialism as it is aligned to continental thought, whose position I come closest to.

What was crucial in Said's *Orientalism* was his foregrounding of self/other distinctions in colonial representational practices. The 'Oriental' other's identity comes from his/her relation to the European West. However, for Said (1978), this production of the colonised other is nothing more than a mirror in which the West sees the rejected and disavowed parts itself. As Said (1978) argues, the 'Orient' as such does not exist. There is no real 'Orient' because the 'Orient' is a Western construction, that is to say, the 'Orient' is not part of the East but an identity of the West, its mirror image of all that is disavowed by the West.

However, Bhabha (1997) suggests that Said's thesis in *Orientalism* produces a reductive reading, that is to say, Said (re)produces a binarization and assumes a regularity between the oppressor and oppressed, between the powerful and the powerless. In other words, Bhabha (1997) suggests that Said assumes a uni-directionality in colonial relations of power, an assumption which re-establishes the binary division between the colonised and the coloniser that Said had deplored. While Bhabha takes seriously Said's thesis of Orientalism as discourse, in particular its system of producing Self/Other relations in various discursive fields, Bhabha, however, problematises first, the claim of a single political and ideological intention of the coloniser. Secondly, he problematises the straight-forward instrumentalist power-knowledge relation that Said assumes. In other words, Bhabha shifts Said's emphasis on the representation of the Orient for its consumption within a dominant Western metropole to focus instead on Orientalism's role when used as an instrument of colonial power and administration. What Bhabha wants to emphasize instead is that the authority of colonial power was not as straightforward as it is first assumed. What he attempts to foreground instead is the ambivalence and instability of colonial relations of power. To do so, Bhabha uses concepts such as 'hybridity', 'ambivalence', 'mimicry', which he claims describe the ambivalent authority of colonial power relations. In Bhabha's theorisation, while these relations of power are not altogether reversed, they certainly are problematised, and certainly begin to vacillate. Crucially, his argument regarding the ambivalence of colonial relations of power and its potential displacement is discussed through his re-reading of the Lacanian gaze and the Focauldian account of the surveillant gaze.

For example, Bhabha's discussion of the production of the colonial stereotype is interpreted through a reading of the Lacanian mirror stage and Freud's theory of the fetish. He argues how colonial stereotypical discourse enables the colonised to be represented, thus enabling them to be 'fixed', rendered knowable and hence, calculable: "despite the 'play' in the colonial system which is crucial to its exercise of power, colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is at once 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible [...] whereby the productivity and circulation of subjects and signs are bound in a reformed and recognizable totality' (Bhabha, 1997: 70-71). However, while Bhabha suggests that the colonised becomes a knowable 'object' within the all-seeing colonial gaze, the colonised can also simultaneously be beyond comprehension (as in, for example, the 'inscrutable Oriental' or 'the mysterious Orient'). According to Bhabha, lurking within colonial stereotypical discourses is a contradictory ambivalence whereby the colonised subject can be both 'savage (cannibal) and yet the most obedient and dignified of servants (the bearer of food); he is the embodiment of rampant sexuality and yet innocent as a child; he is mystical, primitive, simple-minded and yet the most worldly and accomplished liar, and manipulator of social forces' (Bhabha, 1997: 82). In other words, for Bhabha, colonial discourse is never consistent or as monologic as it is assumed. Instead, it is riven by contradictions and anxieties in these paradoxical and mixed modes of representing Otherness.

Crucially, Bhabha suggests that colonial discourse does not merely visualise and make visible the Other, it also projects and disavows difference which is a contradictory structure articulated, according to Bhabha, through the logic of the Freudian fetish associated with its demand for a fixity from the Other: "[A]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as a sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition' (Bhabha, 1997: 66). However, Bhabha argues that the colonial stereotype is not a 'simplification because it is a false representation of a given reality. It is a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that in, denying the play of difference [...] constitutes a problem for the

representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations' (Bhabha, 1997: 75).

In addition, Bhabha proceeds to argue that colonial stereotypical discourses do not simply represent the processes of 'othering'; they simultaneously project and disavow differences. However, in his reading of the colonial stereotype through Freud's theory of the fetish, he argues that colonial mastery is always slipping, never complete and ceaselessly displaced. The colonial stereotype, as it is elaborated through Bhabha's reading of the Freudian fetish, 'is always a "play" or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity [...] and the anxiety associated with lack and difference' (Bhabha, 1997: 74). Crucially, suggested by Bhabha's account of stereotypical discourse is the inherent (in)security of the colonial Self as sovereign. For Bhabha, this is because the stability of the colonial Self as self-coinciding identity is only made possible by the constitutive outside, the colonised.[3] Or as Derrida suggests, 'the truth of the master is in the slave' (Derrida, 1978a: 255). What Bhabha foreground in his conceptualisation of colonial stereotypical discourses is the dependence and demand on fixity and knowability from the constituted Other. For Bhabha, the dependence on the seemingly 'already known' suggests that knowledge and the securing of the Other is not as firmly established as it might imply. As indicated, suggested by this is a 'lack' in the coloniser which is exemplified, for Bhabha, in the way that the stereotype makes possible for the coloniser to identify himself in terms of what he is not. At the same time, for Bhabha, the colonial stereotype undermines the security of the coloniser's identity insofar as this identity is dependent on the Other, as the constitutive outside, for its constitution: 'an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures' (Derrida, 1998a: 28).

---

[3] Bhabha is indicating, of course, that colonial mastery, as it is enacted in colonial stereotypical discourses, operates in the grammars of sovereign power and that by operating within these grammars, one of which is the constitution of the colonised as constitutive outside, the deviation of the European Self, the identity and security of the knowing colonial, European Self is thus rendered securable but because the Self is dependent on the Other to be Other in all its 'otherness', the Other's otherness, as constitutive outside, also frustrates the ontological fullness and impossibility of the sovereign Self to be. However, Bahbha's reading of the colonial sovereign power is not without his critics. For example, many of his critics have argued that his reading of colonial mastery can often be gained from sources other than colonial stereotypical disources, and that his reading often glosses over the diversity of colonial histories, including other important sources of identity-securing practices, such as the presumption of divivne ordination, or Acts of Parliament for example (see for example, Ahmad, 1995; Ashcroft, 1989).

Crucially, what Bhabha emphasizes is the role of the vision in the exercise of colonial power relations particularly the role of vision to produce visible, representable subjects. Taking the methodological approach of a *bricoleur*, Bhabha's theoretical conceptualisation of the role of vision in colonial relations of power draws on Foucault and Lacan to theorise his account of the colonial gaze: the "*surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the *scopic drive* [...] that represents the pleasure in 'seeing', which has the look as its object of desire [locating] the surveyed object within the 'imaginary relation'" (Bhabha, 1997: 76). For Bhabha, as soon as the Other can be made visible and represented, the Other can also be controlled and appropriated for the purposes of colonial administration. Crucially, what Bhabha foregrounds in his reading of the colonial stereotype is that colonial relations of power associated in part with the 'surveillance of colonial power' are co-related with the power to mark, assign and classify, to render visible colonised subjects. In other words, relations of power are exercised not only in terms of economic exploitation and territorial appropriation. They are also exercised in the sphere of the visual that produce in turn regimes of representational practices. Recall Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which charts the ways in which people (fail to) recognise others as they react to visible differences. Fanon's ontological shock of 'dislocation' from his Self was the result of the gaze from an/Other: "'Mama, see a Negro! I'm frightened'. Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter was impossible" (Fanon, 1986: 112). Fanon discovers his difference from the gaze of an Other and is made visible by the visible difference of his 'colour'. But this visibility is cloaked in black racist stereotypes and anecdotes. He is simultaneously visible and yet, invisible, marked and yet, erased, made knowable and yet, ambivalent and Other. As Fanon indicates, his body was territorialized by the gaze of the Other, inscribed and made meaningful by a white boy. As a result of the epistemic violence of the colonial gaze, Fanon's body placed is in a racialised and racist corporeal matrix: '[M]y body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recoloured, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly' (Fanon, 1986: 113).

By drawing on Lacan, what Fanon foregrounds is the epistemic violence intrinsic to colonial relations which put a mirror up to the face of the Black man and the reflection tells him he is inferior, an Other. But this metaphor of the mirror, especially the power relations inherent to the gaze, is one used in Black contemporary art to foreground the epistemic violence intrinsic to social relations. For example, Kobena Mercer (1995) describes a photograph entitled *Mirror, Mirror* (1987) by Carrie Mae Weems. The image depicts a Black woman looking into a mirror. She does not see her reflection in the mirror. Instead, she sees another figure, dressed in white and holding a star. The caption reads: '[L]ooking into the mirror, the black woman asked, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the finest of them all?" The mirror says, "Snow White, you black bitch, and don't you forget it!!!"' (Mercer, 1995: 29). The political implications of this epistemic violence inherent in the practices of the colonising, proprietorial gaze is suggestive of firstly, the institution of racial essentialisms and secondly, the failure of the ethical relation via the institution of a racial hierarchy resulting in an enforced and 'misrecognised' difference, indicative of a politics of arbitrary closure. As Bhabha indicates, these representational practices as they operate through visual practices function within the apparatus of power where 'discourses of sexuality and race relate in a process of *functional overdetermination*' (Bhabha, 1994: 74). As an identity-securing practice, the colonial stereotype, as it is enacted in the colonial 'gaze', becomes a process of producing visible and representable colonised subjects but it is also a way of disavowing and managing alterity and heterogeneity, circulating instead a 'limited form of otherness' (Bhabha, 1997: 77-78). Crucially, for me, Bhabha also indicates, albeit elliptically, that these visual practices, namely an enforcement of visibility via the colonial stereotype for the management of alterity, is complicit with the violence intrinsic in the Western metaphysics of presence and presencing. It is this particular aspect, that of visibility practices and its relation to the Western metaphysic of presence that I explore in Chapter 2. As Bhabha suggests: '[F]rom within the metaphor of vision complicit with a Western metaphysic of Man emerges the displacement of the colonial relation. The black presence runs the representative narrative of Western personhood: its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will not produce a history of civil progress, a space of the *Socius*; [...] The white man's eyes break up the black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed' (Bhabha, 1997: 42).

As indicated, Bhabha does suggest that colonial relations of power are ambivalent, which suggests that colonial identity is riven by a differance: 'the impossibility for an identity to be closed on itself, on the inside of its proper interiority, or its coincidence with itself" (Derrida, 1981: 96). He gives an example of the ambivalence of colonial power relations via his discussion of colonial mimicry. Here, Bhabha argues that colonial mimicry produces a colonised subject who is almost the same but not quite, recognisably the same but still quite different. Bhabha stresses the ambivalence of colonial authority via his reading of Lord Macaulay's 1835 *Minute to Parliament*, which advocates the reproduction of English learning, particularly the teaching of English literature, in India. However, for Bhabha, the method by which this mimicry was to be achieved also indicates the underlying weakness of colonial authority. He gives the example of the Indian civil servant, educated in English, who works for the Indian civil service and mediates between the imperial power and the colonised peoples. These Indians, while Indian by birth, were also English in tastes and opinions. However, the Indian civil servant, while in some respects 'English', in that he resembles the Englishman, is at the same time not entirely like the coloniser. The Indian civil servant is almost 'white', but not quite. For Bhabha, a consequence of Macaulay's suggestions is that mimicry is the process by which the colonised is reproduced as 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1997: 86) – a resemblance that is at once imitation and menace. Thus the familiar, transported to distant parts, becomes uncannily transformed, the 'imitation' of which subverts and disturbs that 'originary' identity. Again, by drawing on Foucault and Lacan in this discussion of colonial mimicry, Bhabha re-emphasizes the role of vision and surveillance in the exercise of colonial power relations. According to Bhabha (1997), far from reassuring colonial relations of power, the surveilling colonial gaze is suddenly confronted by the ricochet of the returning gaze of Otherness and finds its mastery, its sameness undone: "[M]imicry is [...] a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which appropriates the Other as it visualises power. Mimicry [...] intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalised' knowledges and disciplinary powers [...] It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double" (Bhabha, 1997: 86). Mimicry, in Bhabha's account, conceived as the ricochet of the returning gaze, displaces or threatens the colonial disciplinary gaze: '[I]n the

objectification of the scopic drive there is always the threatened return of the look; in the identification of the Imaginary relation there is always the alienating other (or mirror) which crucially returns its image to the subject' (Bhabha, 1997: 81).

While colonial surveillance enables colonial relations of power and the production of visible, representable identities, it also produces, the potential return of a 'gaze' that 'menaces' power: "the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and 'partial' representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence" (Bhabha, 1997: 89). At stake here is the production and identification of the colonised as 'Other', an Otherness that is at the same time entirely visible and 'knowable', is colonial governmentality and the exercise of power:

> [R]acist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of power. Some of its practices recognize the differences of race, culture and history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledges, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalize a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudicial, discriminatory [...] By 'knowing' the native population in these terms, discriminatory and authoritarian forms of political control are considered appropriate. The colonised population is then deemed to be both the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation. What is visible is the *necessity* of such rule which is justified by those moralistic and normative ideologies of amelioration recognised as the Civilizing Mission or the White Man's Burden (Bhabha, 1997: 83).

In this section, what I wanted to foreground is the way Bhabha elaborates an account of colonial relations of power as they are enacted in the register of vision. However, while the preceding discussion laid out a very brief account of Bhabha, it is not my intention here to dwell in depth on the aporias in Bhabha's postcolonial theorisations. Nor is it my intention to present a sustained critique of Bhabha's conceptualisation of 'hybridity', 'ambivalence' or 'mimicry' or his usage of Lacanian psychoanalysis for an

analysis of the social relations of colonialism.[4] Suffice it to say, Bhabha's account of colonial relations of power as they are enacted through the colonial gaze is suggestive of a politics of visibility, of the attempts at installing definable and calculable subject-positions on the colonised for the purposes of colonial administration. For example, in his discussion of the colonial stereotype and colonial mimicry, he suggests how the colonised is registered as a visible and different Other, an Other who, as a subject of an imposed difference, is almost the same but not quite. Secondly, Bhabha suggests that colonial identity is always dependent for its constitution on a colonised Other who, as constitutive outside, is also potentially 'hostile' and which indicates the capacity for a possible reversal of the processes of domination. In other words, Bhabha also indicates a potential for resistance in his discussion of colonial mimicry, namely that the subject who mimics can also refuse to return the coloniser's gaze and which, for Bhabha, is suggestive of a potential destabilising of colonial authority.

What is suggestive in Bhabha's combined Foucauldian and Lacanian discussion of how power relations are enacted and resisted in the register of the visual is how a specular space is opened up by this gaze of knowledge and power, how this colonised space and the constituted identities within it are represented as coherent and lucid. In other words, while Bhabha's work is deeply engaged in the politics of subjectivity, his work seems to allude to the politics of spatiality and its relation to community, national imaginaries and the politics of the Third Space articulated through his reading of Frederic Jameson and Henri Lefebvre (Bhabha, 1997: 212-223). Throughout his book *The Locations of Culture*, he alludes to the production of colonised and postcolonial spaces which have particular relations to the constitution of subject positions within these spaces. Moreover, he suggests that these subject positions and their relation to spatiality are themselves underscored by relations of power. For example, in his discussion of Third Space, Bhabha understands (cultural) difference not as the acquisition and the mapping of diversity, but as the enactment of the undecidable (Bhabha, 1997: 126).

---

[4] For critiques of Bhabha, see for example, Ahmad (1995), JanMohammed (1985), Parry (1987) and Norval (1999).

Bhabha writes that these Third Spaces are the spaces of resistances, the spaces of 'incommensurability-vision' (Bhabha, 1997: 128) that are un-representable (Bhabha, 1997: 37). However, as the 'place of difference, the space of the adversarial, [the] agonistic' (Bhabha, 1997: 109), these spaces, for Bhabha, localise a resistance, displacing the histories that constitute it. For Bhabha, these are the spaces where differences bleed into one another, the spaces of in-betweeness and of undecidability (in Derrida's sense of the word) where power relations are destabilised or their authority rendered ambivalent. Thus, what is suggested by Bhabha's Third Space is that its 'incommensurability-vision' has the potential to displace those imposed closures, and makes possible something different, something that cannot be contained within the politics of the colonising proprietorial gaze with its desire to enframe Otherness: 'the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation' (Bhabha, 1990a: 211).

Also, while Bhabha foregrounds how relations of power are enacted in the register of the visual, he is not explicit when it comes to examining political disposition lurking within these practices of vision. In other words, while he alludes to it, namely that vision is complicit with a Western metaphysic of Man (Bhabha, 1997: 42); he is not explicit in his discussion of this metaphysic of Western Man and its relation to the practices of vision and the politics underlying such practices that compels the colonised to experience that ontological shock of dislocation. Gayatri Spivak also alludes to it, especially those colonial representational politics that are 'engaged in consolidating the self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground' (Spivak, 1985: 133). In her case, Spivak (1985) indicates the epistemic violence of signification inherent in the processes of an imperial worlding of non-European spaces, a worlding whereby '[H]e is worlding their own world, which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging them to domesticate the alien as Master' (Spivak, 1985:133). Like Spivak, Cixious also elaborates this epistemic violence but in more eloquent tones. Cixous presents this colonial scene of epistemic violence where one was obliged to cathect the colonial Master as sovereign, a violence in which the colonised is rendered invisible, alien and Other:

> I come, biographically, from a rebellion, from a violent and anguished

> direct refusal to accept what is happening on the stage on whose edge I find I am placed [...] I learned to read, to write, to scream, and to vomit in Algeria. Today I know from experience that one cannot imagine what an Algerian French girl was: you have to have been it, to have gone through it. To have seen 'Frenchmen' at the 'height' of imperialist blindness, behaving in a country that was inhabited by humans as if it were peopled by nonbeings, born-slaves. I learned everything from this first spectacle: I saw how the white (French), superior, plutocratic, civilised world founded its power on the repression of populations who had suddenly become 'invisible', like proletarians, immigrant workers, minorities who are not the right 'colour'. Women. Invisible as humans. But, of course, perceived as tools – dirty, stupid, lazy, underhanded, etc. Thanks to some annihilating dialectical magic. I saw that the great, noble, 'advanced' countries established themselves by expelling what was 'strange'; excluding it but not dismissing it; enslaving it. A commonplace gesture of History: there have to be two races – the masters and the slaves (Cixous and Clement, 1986: 10).

To return to the discussion: these are, then, the questions I am left with after an admittedly brief exploration of Bhabha. As indicated earlier, what drew me to Bhabha was the way he raises certain questions, namely that of subjectivity as it is enacted through the practices of the colonial gaze and how this subjectivity is enacted and made possible visually and spatially. Firstly, Bhabha suggests that lurking within the practices of vision is a complicitous relationship with a Western metaphysic of Man which is made possible by the displacement of the colonial relation. In the next chapter, I want to pursue this suggestive remark but with a recourse also to Spivak's remark regarding the worlding of colonial Man as sovereign and subject. In other words, the question I want to pursue in Chapter 2 is the colonial politics of the visible as it is witnessed in colonial spatial thought. However, I contextualise this by locating this exploration in colonial Singapore and in doing so, I ask: what is the political disposition underpinning the colonial politics of the visible. Secondly and relatedly, what are the politics underpinning colonial Man's worlding?

Although not explicit, Bhabha alludes to and suggests the political disposition lurking in visibility practices as it is exercised within the colonial gaze. For Bhabha, the colonial gaze is co-relational with the exercise of power and knowledge. For me, this exercise of power in the colonial gaze, while related to the will to power in colonial knowledge production, is also co-related to the production of visibility, suggestive of calculative-representative politics and the constitution of limit-conditions. So I ask: what is the political disposition underpinning these visibility practices? In other words, what is suggestive is that these relations of power and the production of knowledge that enable the securing of the Other are also practices of the limit, of defining the limit-condition, which is simultaneous with the imposition of closures and erections of boundaries. As indicated, while I propose to explore the politics underpinning visibility practices of the colonial gaze in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3, I propose instead to look at the visibility politics of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism. Indeed, Bhabha suggests that multiculturalism as it is often construed is 'an attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference, administering a *consensus* based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity' (Bhabha, 1990a: 208-209). I propose that, as a containment and management of difference, postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism, while a disavowal of alterity, is also a community-securing practice that produces the community of the 'We'. I suggest that implicit in this community-securing of the homogenised 'We' is the calculative-representative thought underpinning the metaphysical politics of the visible. But Bhabha has also suggested that there are spaces that locate an incommensurability-vision, suggestive of practices of resistance that displace those imposed closures and which are also enactments of the undecidable. In Chapter 3, I suggest that one of these spaces of incommensurability-vision is located in postcolonial performances. Thus, in Chapter 3, I explore a Singaporean performance, namely TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, a performance that enacts an in-operative community and which is moreover suggestive of a radical relation to the community-to-come. Underpinning my reading of TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, then, are the following questions: what are the politics lurking in this refusal of visibility? What is the ethic played out in the performance of the in-operative community?

But before I explore the above questions, to better think through Bhabha's conceptualisation of the power relations inherent in the 'gaze' and the practices of vision and its entwinement with spatiality, in the following sections, I turn to firstly, Foucault's conceptualisation of the gaze of power as it relates to spatiality. Secondly, I attempt to think through Lefebvre's account of spatiality. I turn to Lefebvre because my exploration of Bhabha compels me to ask what are the practices of spatiality as it relates to colonial worlding. And this question leads me to Chapter 2 where I attempt to explore the politics underlying colonial worlding.

Foucault and the Eye of Power: Space–Power–Vision

> Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power
>
> Foucault

Foucault has argued that space can no longer be 'treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile' (Foucault, 1980: 70). Space, according to Foucault, is fundamental in the exercise of power. Moreover, as Foucault writes, 'Space itself [...] has a history' (1998: 176). Indeed, space is to be understood as actively operative and productive in the constructions of social relations and actions, and of subjectivity. Space, for Michel Foucault, is thus not merely another area to be analysed. It is central to his approach.[5] As Foucault argues:

> Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory [...] Endeavouring [...] to decipher

[5] See for example Elden (2001a) who argues convincingly on this point: 'we need to both historicize space and spatialize history [...] we need to recognise how space, place and location are crucial determining factors in any historical study. This is the project of spatial history' (2001a: 3). For Elden (2001a), Foucault's historical analyses are 'spatial through and through' (2001a: 3). However, this chapter also works from the acknowledgement that the realm of the visual and the practices of the vision equally informs Michel Foucault's works.

> discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power. (Foucault, 1980a: 69-70).

As Foucault explains it, by tracing the forms of 'implantation', 'displacement', we also approach an understanding of the politics of knowledge production and the power relations inherent to them. Emplacement, Foucault suggests, 'is defined by the relations of proximity between points and elements' (Foucault, 1998: 176). Suggestive of this placing of 'things' in space is that of a violence of enframements and displacement. In other words, emplacement involves dividing practices where the tagging and codification of various discrete elements in games of distribution produce a hierarchical ordering of differential and *differentiated* objects in space. As Foucault suggests, the processes of delimitation and demarcation in spatial practices throw into relief the processes and modalities of power. The production, the organisation and the enframements of space and the objects within it are fundamental in the exercise of power.[6]

Space, as Foucault has also argued, is a social product. Indeed, conceptualising space as a social product is an acknowledgement that spatial practices are productive of differences. It is a difference produced from the 'delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains' (Foucault, 1980a: 70) that is simultaneously constitutive of the processes of *emplacement* that throw into relief the 'processes – historical ones, needless to say – of power' (Foucault, 1980a: 70). It is through emplacement, co-relative with dividing, calculative practices, that the production of space and the accompanying effects of power demarcate and exclude specific subjects indicating at the same time, the way concrete space is produced and arranged. Indeed, Foucault argues that disciplinary spaces emerge out of a division of space into

> many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed....its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to

---

[6] See, for example, 'Space, Knowledge, Power' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York, 1991)) where he details in an interview the modern institutionalisation of power in spatial terms and the simultaneous disciplining and allocation of bodies in architectural space.

> interrupt operations, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities and merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastery and using. Discipline organises an analytical space (Foucault, 1979: 143).

Inherent to these spatial practices, that of processes of delimitation and demarcation intrinsic to the representations of spaces, are the mapping of uncharted space, of the imposition of the known on the unknown. The impositions of limit-conditions, of the production of bounded space and the study of boundary-drawing practices are intrinsic to his theoretical concerns. In other words, fundamental to his methodology is the study of limits and the imposition of limit-conditions. As Foucault explains, his work is concerned with limits:

> To establish limits, where the history of thought, in its traditional form, gave itself an indefinite space [substituting] the notion that the discourses are limited practical domains which have their boundaries [frontiers – borders/frontiers], their rules of formation, their conditions of existence [...] to which one can affix thresholds, and assign conditions of birth and disappearance (Foucault, 1996: 41).

Foucault's conceptualisation of space also suggests an instrumentality of space as a register wherein power relations and ideologies are embedded: 'space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (Foucault, 1991: 252). However, this spatial exercise of power is particularly enacted on the body and the production of knowable bodies. For Foucault, this understanding of space and its relation to the placement of bodies within it are also tied up to knowledge production of the bodies within sites [*emplacement*]: '[T]his problem of the human site [*l'emplacement humain*] is not simply that of knowing whether there will be enough room for humans in the world [...] but also that of knowing what relations of proximity, what type of storage, circulation, mapping, and classification of human elements should be adopted in a given situation in order to achieve a given end' (Foucault, 1994: 753-754). As such, both the body and bodies become a terrain for the demand and mapping of knowledge, the site of calculability – the field and medium on which power operates and through which it functions:

> [...] the body is [...] directly involved in a political field; power relations

> have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but on the other hand, its constitution of labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection [...] the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body (Foucault, 1979: 25-6).

With regard to the subjection of the body, Foucault was thus keenly aware of the important role played by a classifying and surveillant gaze in the operation of both sovereign power and spatial practices where 'the sovereignty of the gaze' relates to 'the eye that knows and decides, the eye that governs' (Foucault, 1975:89). This 'eye of power', Foucault argues, thus becomes 'the depository and source of clarity' (Foucault, 1975: xiii), a 'light of reason' which 'has the power to bring a truth to light that it receives only to the extent that is has brought it to light; as it opens, the eye first opens the truth: a flexion that marks the transition from the world of classical clarity [...] to the nineteenth century' (Foucault, 1975:xiii). This modern gaze thus enjoys a certain privilege in that it serves the desire and the capacity of mastery and of domination (a will to power) that is complicitous with disciplinary practices and the desire for knowledge: 'the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates; and although it also knows how to subject itself, it dominates as its masters' (Foucault, 1975: 39).[7] In the *Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault highlights the themes of the book which relate to, as he puts it, 'light and liberty' (Foucault, 1975: 52), the opening lines of which reads: 'this book is about space, about language, and about death; it is a question of the gaze' (Foucault, 1975: ix). It is this critique of the gaze that situates his efforts to bring to foreground and make visible the correlations between practices of vision and perception, technologies and the formation and the institution of medicine and its association with the discourse of man, whereby the discursive practices of this gaze

---

[7] However, as early as 1961 in *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault took an interest in ocularcentric questions where he argues that 'madness was shown [...] under the eyes of *reason* [...] Madness had become a thing to look at [Foucault, 1992 (1961): 70]. Further, 'madness is responsible only for that part of itself which is visible. All the rest is reduced to silence. Madness no longer exists except as *seen*' [Foucault, 1992 (1961): 250].

became a gaze that 'atomises the most individual flesh and enumerates its secret bits, [and] is that fixed, attentive rather dilated gaze which, from the height of death, has already condemned life' (Foucault, 1975: 166).

Foucault further suggests that the system of spatial sciences are constitutive of a production of disciplinary and abstract social spaces – spaces that are formed out of surveillance, control and regulation. Its characteristic figure of control and discipline is, according to Foucault, the Panopticon. He writes

> Our society is not one of spectacle, but of surveillance [...] We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in a panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of the mechanism (Foucault, 1979: 217).

For Foucault, the term 'panopticism' is used to suggest firstly, how power is exercised in the 'empire of the gaze'[8] and secondly, how power relations are enacted in the register of the visual. Panopticism thus relates to power relations lurking within the 'Eye of Power', to the 'problem of visibility [...] organised entirely around a dominating, overseeing gaze' (Foucault, 1980: 152). This dominating gaze refers to the frightening prospect of a 'transparent society', to an 'all-seeing power', to a 'power through transparency' in a 'project of universal visibility' (Foucault, 1980: 152-154). Further, as an apparatus of power, surveillance, as Foucault indicates, is coextensive with the arrangements of bodies in space. For Foucault, as was suggested earlier, it is through this emplacement of bodies, the relative arrangement and distribution of the proximity of bodies as elements in space that constitutes a violence of hierarchization, of distinctions and which is accompanied by the production of differences. The exercise of power in the surveillant gaze is thus an important mechanism of power as it is concerned with a concerted effort to distribute, arrange and demarcate bodies in games of divisions and distributions within which the body-object is located and subjected to the sovereign gaze. This 'Eye of Power' as Foucault remarks, is concerned with vision and light and the deployment of force, it establishes 'over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them' (Foucault, 1979: 184). The Eye of Power is thus co-relational with 'the

---

[8] This term is derived from Martin Jay 'In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought' in Hoy (1986) *Foucault: A Critical Reader.*

subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected' (Foucault, 1979: 184-5).

Indeed, this surveillant, normalizing gaze makes 'it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish', (Foucault, 1979: 184) particularly in relation to regimes of power dependent on bodies founded on a 'continuous and permanent systems of surveillance' (Foucault, 1980: 105). For Foucault, this connection between the Eye of Power with that of bio-power and governmentality highlights a new hegemony of the gaze: panopticism. As Foucault argued

> [B]y the term 'Panopticism', I have in mind an ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power. Panopticism was a technological invention in the order of power [...] And, at a certain moment in time, these methods began to become more generalised. [...] The Panoptic system was not so much confiscated by the State apparatuses, rather it was these apparatuses which rested on the basis of small-scale, regional, dispersed Panopticisms. In consequence one cannot confine oneself to analysing the State apparatus alone if one wants to grasp the mechanisms of power in their detail and complexity. There is a sort of schematism that needs to be avoided here [...] that consists of locating power in the state apparatus. [...] In reality, power in its exercise goes much further, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous, since each individual [...] can also act as the vehicle of transmitting a wider power (Foucault, 1979: 72).

What is suggestive of Foucault's conceptualisation of panopticism, that of the 'dominating, overseeing gaze' (Foucault, 1980:152), is a polyvalent matrix and apparatus of surveillance, a matrix that is constitutive of power relations that operate as capillaries through which spatial relations of bodies in the social body-space are produced and rendered visible, defined, categorised, differentiated and subjectified. Power, as conceptualised by Foucault, is productive and immanent – it is omnipresent, it suffuses the social body, constitutively involved in the double processes of subjection and subject-formation. This light of violence, associated in part to a force within the very structure of this gaze, produces just as it rationalizes in

a violence of abstraction that guarantees the 'submission of bodies' (Foucault, 1979: 222). That is to say, what is being articulated here by Foucault is the relationship between power, vision and the subjection of the body. As Foucault writes

> The real, corporal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties. The contract may have been regarded as the ideal foundation of law and political power; panopticism constituted the technique, universally widespread, of coercion. It continued to work in depth on the juridical structures of society, in order to make effective mechanisms of power function in opposition to the formal framework it acquired. The 'Enlightenment', which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines (Foucault, 1979: 222).

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that Foucault's focus on the dangers of the panoptic gaze left some wondering about the possibility of subverting the power of the gaze, particularly in the practices of the lived spaces of everyday life. Moreover, it might seem that from the above account of panopticism that Foucault may have too hastily absorbed all power relations into a hegemonic ocularcentric apparatus. However, we should remember that although Foucault argues that power 'is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it can come from everywhere' (Foucault, 1998: 92), he also does suggest that 'in relations of power, there is necessarily the possibility of resistance [...] if there are relations of power throughout every social field, it is because there is freedom everywhere' (Foucault, 1988: 12-13). A way to understand Foucault's conceptualisation of power is via the French word he uses – *pouvoir* – which means 'to be able', thereby capturing 'the creative, productive sense of power, rather than merely the forceful, repressive sense' (Elden, 2001a: 106). Resistance, for Foucault, is a relation of power, part of the strategies of power. Moreover, for the continued existence of power, for Foucault, there is a further dependence by power on a 'dense web' of multiple, mobile and transitory points of resistance:

> [...] there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent [...] they can only exist in a strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or a rebound, forming with

> respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat. Resistances [...] are the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as the irreducible opposite (Foucault, 1998: 96).

In short, for Foucault, 'there are no relations of power without resistance' (Foucault, 1980: 142). Indeed, for Foucault, the existence of power depends on points of resistances. While there are relations of power, there are also resistances: 'this does not mean that they [resistances] are only a reaction or rebound [...] they are the other term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite' (Foucault, 1998a: 96). But as Foucault indicates, freedom is also necessary in resistances to relations of power. This is because freedom is the condition of possibility for the possibility of resistances. Freedom, as Foucault remarks, is the ontological condition of ethics (Foucault, 1996: 435) and is 'all the more real and effective' when it is formed at the point where power is exercised and operative: 'it exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated into global strategies' (Foucault, 1980: 142). Foucault therefore rejects the conceptualisation of power in terms of oppositional duality or binary structures: "one should not assume a massive and primal condition of domination, a binary structure with the 'dominators' on one side and 'dominated' on the other" (Foucault, 1980: 142), insisting again in *The History of Sexuality* that 'power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and the ruled at the root of power relations [...] no such duality extending from top down' (Foucault, 1998a: 94). Indeed, within the practices of the 'Eye of Power' which are compelled by a desire for visibility, human-beings are therefore rendered knowable and calculable, securable by policing and observation (as in *Discipline and Punish*), normalising judgement and the medical examination (as in *The Birth of the Clinic*). But if power exists and is exercised in terms of relations, emanating from multiple points, then it follows that where there is power, there is resistance. However, it is not a resistance to power that is outside power but rather a multiplicity of points of resistances, 'a plurality of resistances' (Foucault, 1998a: 96) that 'are present everywhere in the power network' (Foucault, 1998a: 95) – local articulations of power confronting other articulations of power that struggle to 'escape from the system of Law-and-

Sovereign' (Foucault, 1998a: 97). What is at stake here is recognising that the body-subject is not to be thought of as merely a 'passive object' to be rendered calculable, not merely a map, a site on which power and meaning are inscribed. Although the body-space of the subject is repeatedly territorialized, deterritorialised and re-territorialised by plays of power and the practices of vision, it should also be recognised that the body has a space and is a space. The body, thus construed, also makes space, producing, reproducing and articulating itself simultaneously in real, imagined and symbolic spatialities. We make and resist our spatialities in the process of our various identity-formations. The body-subject makes space by settling and unsettling itself in place – a pure relationality that is constituted through the social symbolic body. Indeed, we also create and clear an agonal space in the process of realizing our agonal subjectivity when we attempt to test the imposed limit-conditions in our desire to push beyond the power-knowledge practices that attempt to institute those closures.

Indeed, for Foucault, these relations of power and the accompanying production of knowledge are also practices of defining limit-conditions, which is another name for the imposition of closures. And the imposition of such closures, of what can be said, of what we can do and be, of the decisive imposition of what is the only possible possible are correlative with the production of the subject who is firstly tied to someone's control and who is also tied to his or her own identity as a result of those imposed limit-conditions. In other words, for Foucault, a body-subject is only knowable and governable because relations of power have established it as a knowable object. The formation of the subject is thus made possible by being constrained to those limiting identity-positions. But, as Foucault indicates, the condition of possibility of subjectivity as imposed limitation is also the condition of possibility for the exercise of freedom and which directs the subject's agonal struggle for the search for new alternatives and new forms of subjectivities. This agonism is the condition of possibility for a search for the otherwise, which is conditioned, as indicated in Chapter 3, by an apophatic desire for the Beyond. This thinking at the limit is thus an agonistic thinking conditioned by the desire to move beyond the limits of our present-vision. As I suggest in Chapter 3, this also means that this thinking at the limit represents a movement away from the onto-theologic politics of the visible which is expressed as the desire to know and to be absolutely. In other words, the

practices of installing the limit is also the condition of possibility of a thinking otherwise and this desire to be-come-otherwise is compelled, as I suggest in Chapter 4, by an eschatological desire. This is because the power relations that have rendered us calculable and knowable subjects is also the same power that determines and inspires oppositional practices that refuse the imposed subjectivities. As Simons (1995) indicate, 'we must refuse to be what we are: because if we fight to be what we truly are, we will not dismantle our confinements, merely rearrange them; because the enabling limits of that which we are constrain us to remain what we are unless we can resist the limits; because to accept what we are means to accept subjection' (Simons, 1995: 50). As Simons explains, Foucault's political critique of the limit does not seek to propose another better alternative: "[W]hen faced with the 'tiresome question' of 'what replaces the system', Foucault responds 'that to imagine another system is to extend our participation in the present system" (Simons, 1995: 50). Instead, the agonal transgressions of imposed limit-conditions are, as Simons explains it, an "illumination of limits, 'like a flash of lightning in the night which [...] owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation'" (Simons, 1995: 69). Indeed, the attempt to think at the limits, to think the otherwise takes the form of an agonal contestation demonstrating, at the same time, 'that what we are, our being, depends on the existence of limits [demonstrating] that no limits are absolute [and which] depends on the recognition of the limitedness of the limit' (Simons, 1995: 69).

Interestingly, Foucault does theorise an-Other space that localises this contestation of limits, which is equally compelled by the practice of freedom by the human body-subject. For Foucault, the space that localises the contestation of limits is that of 'heterotopia' and 'heteropology', conceptualised as disturbing, inconsistent spatial configurations that undermine the alleged coherence of the dominant spatial-visual regime and recalls Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of Third Space as 'incommensurability-vision'.[9] Heterotopias, as Foucault indicates, are the Other spaces – the lived, everyday, real places – conceivably the spaces of contestation and opposition. According to Foucault, heterotopias are "real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, [they are] real

[9] Foucault's original conception of 'heterotopias' was delineated in a short lecture on space he presented to a group of architects on 14 March, 1967 later published in *Diacritics*, 16 (1986) and subsequently re-published in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology 1954-1984*, London: Penguin, 1998.

emplacements [that] are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all other emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places 'heterotopias'" (Foucault, 1998: 178). As spaces of contestation, these lived embodied spaces are 'different spaces [...] other places, a kind of contestation, both mythical and real, of the space in which we live. This description could be called "heteropology"' (Foucault, 1998: 179). In short, heterotopias are the spaces where the very grounds of securing categorizations and knowledge formations are made difficult, where 'things' are left riskily underdefined: "*[H]eterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and opposite one another) to 'hold together'" (Foucault, 1992a: xviii).

As lived embodied spaces, these Other spaces are the spaces of radical openness, suggestive of counter-sites that contain the possibilities of new discoveries and strategies that elude or evade the dominance of the panoptic gaze. According to Simons (1995), while heterotopias are uncertain spaces, they are not non-spaces 'beyond all systems of ordering places' (Simons, 1995: 90). Rather, heterotopias are more suggestive of spaces that are situated at the limits of one episteme and the beginnings of another. In Chapter 3, I suggest that heterotopias contain the seeds of poetics, namely the poetics of the (im)possible. For the purpose here, suffice it to say that heterotopias push knowledge and knowability to the margins of that which can be thought and the limits of what can be said. As Simons explains it, heterotopias indicate 'the fragility and contingency of any episteme [and] suggests that orders different from those which we consider natural are possible by going to the margins rather than stepping outside epistemes' (Simons, 1995: 90). Heterotopias are thus localised in the lived, everyday embodied spaces that are heterogeneous to the dominant visual-spatio regime. Underpinned by an agonistic critical ontology, heterotopias are compelled by attempts to test and explore the limit-conditions. Heterotopias, then, are spaces that subvert the dominant spatio-visual ordering and

distribution of bodies in space, re-conceiving space as that which is not a void, not 'dead', 'fixed' or 'immobile'. As heterogeneous spaces, heterotopias are not only merely ensemble of relations, heterotopias are a set of different emplacements (Foucault, 1998: 178). By suggesting heterotopias as Other spaces that resists the visibility practices of the dominant spatio-visual regime, the emphasis is placed on the situatedness of the counter-sites of lived, embodied spaces. Heterotopias, as Other spaces-bodies are, in Foucault's conceptualisation, thus better thought of as heretical spaces 'beyond' that which is presently known and taken for granted.

In this section, I endeavoured to highlight the relations between vision, power and space. This section's discussion was enabled by my exploration of Bhabha's conceptualisation of the colonial gaze in the preceding section. In discussing Foucault, I also explored the significance of the relationship between *voir* (sight), *pouvoir* (power) and *savoir* (knowledge). Further, we glimpsed the relations of power and knowledge and their co-relational links to the practices of vision, power and the demarcation of spaces. Moreover, we see how the body-subject is produced as a visible and knowable subject who is captured in the intersections of the practices of *voir*, *pouvoir* and *savoir*. For Foucault, the materiality of the body-subject may be the site, the object and the target of power and knowledge – of subjection and objectification wherein the body-subject is seized, captured and moulded in these multiple conduits of *voir*, *savoir* and *pouvoir* :

> The body is indeed the privileged object of power's operations: power produces the body as a determinate type, with particular features, skills, and attributes. Power is the internal condition for the constitution and activity attributed to a body-subject. It is power which produces a "soul" or interiority as a result of a certain type of etching of the subject's body [...] Power does not control the subject [...] rather, it surveys, supervises, observes, measures the body's behaviour and interactions
>
> (Grosz, 1994: 149)

However, the body-subject is also the site of resistances and the practices of freedom – the ontological condition of possibility for ethics. The body-subject, the site that locates heterotopias, is also the site of a refusal of visibility practices. In this section, what I have attempted to explore is Foucault's conceptualisation of the

relations of power intrinsic to those practices of vision and which is propelled by his critique of Western culture's ocularcentrism.[10] His tactical deployment of visual metaphors are used at the same time to produce a critique of the practices inherent to vision, to problematise a mode of vision that has been and still is complicitous with the plays of power and knowledge production. These practices of vision are intertwined with the imposition of visibilities and associated with the imposition of calculability and knowability. This practice of vision, as an 'eye of power', renders everything within its sight visible, 'a visibility organised around a dominating, overseeing gaze' in 'a project of universal visibility' (Foucault, 1980: 152).

Nevertheless, Foucault's theorisations of space as that which is alive is also opposed to traditional conceptualisation of space as 'fixed and immobile' and in many respects this is somewhat in correspondence with Lefebvre's (2000) conceptualisations of space. He too argues that space should not simply be regarded as an empty space or as a stage for social relations and actions but operative in the assembly of these. In the next section, I attempt to flesh out firstly, Lefebvre's 'trialectics of space' to produce a reading in which Lefebvrian spatiality has to be understood as intertwined with that of the body. To reiterate, I turn to Lefebvre because my exploration of Bhabha compels me to ask what are the practices of spatiality and what are the politics lurking within colonial Man's worlding. I also turn to Lefebvre because together with Foucault's account of spatiality and Spivak's suggestive account of worlding of colonial Man, I hope to come to a better understanding of the body's relation to space. I do this because in Chapter 2, I explore and come to an understanding of the political disposition inherent to the colonial politics of the visible especially its relation to the politics of colonial worlding.

Lefebvre: Space, Bodies, Vision

> I repeat that there is a politics of space because space is political.
>
> Lefebvre

In order to elaborate how (social) space is produced non-reductively, *The Production of Space* (Lefebvre, 2000) conceptualises space as constituted and secreted from a

[10] See Martin Jay (1994) for his thesis on Foucault's critique of ocularcentrism.

conceptual triad of 'three elements and not two' (Lefebvre, 2000: 39). For Lefebvre, space is produced and distinguished between spatial practices, representations of space and spaces of representation. Moreover, for Lefebvre, these three forms of spatial production and spatialities relate to three kinds of social space and spatialities: mental space (representations of space), the space of social practice (spatial practice) and the space of conceived essences (spaces of representation) (Lefebvre, 2000: 5). In other words, the Lefebvrian triad conceives a unity 'between physical, mental and social space' (Elden, 2001: 815).

In the Lefebvrian conceptual triad, 'representations of space' refer to the organs and tools of spatial domination that are constitutive of constellations of power, knowledge and spatiality in which the dominant social order is materially inscribed. In other words, representations of space refer to the dominant space or the dominant mode of producing that space in that social order. Lefebvre writes

> I would argue [...] that representations of space are shot through with a knowledge (*savoir*) – i.e. a mixture of understanding (*connaissance*) and ideology – which is always relative and in the process of change (Lefebvre, 2000: 41).

For Lefebvre, representations of space tend to spaces of *savoirs*, connected to formal and institutional practices of power. This form of spatial production is a result of the technical and the rational and space is produced as 'instrumental space of social engineers and urban planners' (Elden, 2001: 815), one result of which is the production of readable spaces emanating from the 'logic of visualisation' (Lefebvre, 2000: 41). In other words, as construed by Lefebvre, 'representations of space' (conceptions of space or conceived space) work within the "primacy of the gaze in a kind of 'logic of visualisation'"(Lefebvre, 2000:41) that parallels at the same time, all the codified practices which confer "'knowledge', 'science' and mastery – in a word, all the epistemologies of power: *savoir*, in Foucault's sense" (Murphet, 1999: 204).This 'logic of visualisation', that of the practices of vision inherent in representations of space, tend towards Renaissance linear perspectivialism that have become enshrined in architectural and urban spatial practice. In short, these representations are dependent on the logic of visualisation that rely on 'the vanishing line, the vanishing-point and the meeting of parallel lines' that are simultaneously as intellectual as it is visual and which perhaps equally denotes an ocularcentric mode

of thinking (Lefebvre, 2000: 41). Like Foucault, Lefebvre introduces a critique of the abstract transcendental illusion of rationalism identifiable with that of an ocularcentrism. This ocularcentrism is premised on the semblance of an apodicity of Occidental self-certainty producing an apparent illusion of the transparency of (social) space that seemingly appears 'luminous' and intelligible. Echoing Foucault's panopticon, this mode of viewing space is underpinned by a desire for visibility in which social space is seemingly free of traps or hidden places, capable of

> being taken in by a single glance from that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates. Comprehension is thus supposed, without meeting any insurmountable obstacles, to conduct what is perceived [...] it is supposed to effect this displacement of the object either by piercing it with a ray [of light] or by converting it, after certain precautions have been taken, from a murky to a luminous state (Lefebvre, 2000: 28).

Indeed, among the representations of space that Lefebvre attaches particular importance are the discourses of spatial sciences (this includes mainstream Cartesian geometry, linear perspective, cartography, architecture and urban planning) as well as the production of urban space that render space and the objects within intelligible and seemingly transparent.[11] This particular mode of representing space renders space calculable; it 'fragments space and cuts it up into pieces. It enumerates the things, the various objects that space contains. Specializations divide space among them and act upon its truncated parts, setting up mental barriers and practico-social frontiers' (Lefebvre, 2000: 89). By working according to the 'logic of visualisation', what Lefebvre foregrounds is that this mode of spatial organisation relates to the 'violence of abstraction' and what it hides is that of power. This abstraction of space, underpinned by the 'logic of visualization', construes space as seemingly lucid and calculable but it also homogenises differences, that is to say, abstraction of space 'mould the spaces it dominates [...] and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistances it encounters there [...] monuments have a phallic aspect, towers exude arrogance, and the bureaucratic

---

[11] He declares that these representations of space relate to the spaces conceptualised and produced by 'scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers [...] all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived' (Lefebvre, 2000: 38). However, he also identifies conceived space as tending towards 'a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs' (Lefebvre, 2000: 39).

and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space is everywhere' (Lefebvre, 2000: 49-50). That the practices of visibility underlying the representations of space by which space is homogenised even as power is exercised is undoubted for Lefebvre. According to Lefebvre, the control of space via calculability, enumerability and the logic of visualisation presumes, establishes and maintains an arrogant will to power, and the way space is produced also reproduces the value systems of the dominant powerholders. Space is thus produced by and mirrors, at the same time, the dominant social symbolic order. Space, then, is marked by the will to power and such a space, for example, the production of a colonial space also does not allow or permit other spaces and spatialities. Such a space is the space of prohibitions, it is both the medium and message of power:

> That space signifies is incontestable. But what it signifies is dos and don'ts – and this brings us back to power. Power's message is invariably confused – deliberately so; dissimulation is necessarily part of any message of power. Thus, space indeed 'speaks' – but it does not tell all. Above all, it prohibits (Lefebvre, 2000: 142).

Here, Lefebvre seems to be suggesting that both space and power speaks but above all, space as it is produced by the dominant powerholders also prohibits and that it is bound up with the prescriptive and prohibitive power of the Law: 'there can be no question but that social space is the locus of prohibition, for it is shot through with both prohibitions and their counterparts, prescriptions' (Lefebvre, 2000: 201). While the dominant form of producing social space is marked by power and the institution of prohibitions, Lefebvre also indicates that lurking within the representations of space is that of an imperialistic proprietorial power:

> Herein lies the secret of the Logos as foundation of all power and all authority; hence too the growth in Europe of knowledge and technology, industry and imperialism. Space [...] [has] this deadly character: as the locus of separations and the milieu of prohibitions (Lefebvre, 2000: 135).

Soja (2000) links Lefebvre's representations of space (conceived space) to that of a 'Secondspace', which is 'subjective and imagined' and therefore concerned with 'images and representations of spatiality'. Thus any analysis of 'representations of space' is simultaneously an exploration of the production of 'conceptual and symbolic

worlds' within the dominant social order (Soja, 2000: 18). It could be argued as well that representations of space are equally concerned at the same time with the conceptual spatialisation of identity/difference. In this sense, conceived space or 'representations of space' relates to the discourses of spatial practices. As such, conceived space (Secondspace) relates to the way "we think about, analyse, explain, experience, and act upon or 'practice' human spatiality'" (Soja, 2000: 19).

As indicated, this production of social space emerges out of a trialectics of spatiality. For Soja (2000), the trialectics of spatial practices, of spatial thinking and of the spatial imagination are a triple interweaving of Lefebvre's conceived-perceived-lived spaces. Moreover, for Soja (2000), the term does not merely describe a triple dialectic but also a mode of 'dialectical reasoning' that is inherently spatial compared to the conventional temporally and teleologically defined dialectical thought. Soja (2000) argues that Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality opens a pathway to thinking 'differently', that is, to a critical re-interpretation of the spatiality of human life through the relations between the 'historicality of human life' (time and history) and the 'sociality of human life' (social relations and social spaces). In other words, space is a component in the relations of production (Soja, 1989). Space, then, is not simply a backdrop, a container without content. For Lefebvre, as I will indicate, the body is central to the way space is produced, represented and lived. However, we should be aware that Soja's account of the triple dialectic of space is a problematic translation and conceptualisation of Lefebvre's *dialectique de triplicite.* As Elden (2001) explains, Lefebvre's *dialectique de triplicite* 'is neither a replacement of dialectical reasoning with trialectics nor the introduction of space into a dialectic' (Elden, 2001: 812). Crucially, Lefebvre's *dialectique de triplicite* is not the 'resolution of two conflicting terms, but a three-way process, where the synthesis is able to react to the two terms. The third term is not the result of the dialectic: it is there, but it is no longer seen as a culmination' (Elden, 2001: 812). For Elden, the Lefebvrian trialectic is a historicism of sorts but, crucially, it does not only indicate a historicising of space or a spatialising of history – not a merely a spatial history but also a history of spaces, of events and moments where the notion of history is radicalised 'so that it becomes spatialised' (Elden, 2001: 817) thus showing 'how space is important in a number of ages, though in different ways' (Elden, 1997: 48). For Lefebvre (2000), the triad is an attempt to move away from a binary, dichotomous mode of thinking that is

embedded and epitomised in traditional philosophical thought, a mode of thought that has become naturalised and 'self-evident': "[R]elations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonism. They are defined by significant effects [...] Philosophy has found it very difficult to get beyond such dualisms as subject and object, Descartes's [sic] *res cognitans* and *res extensa* [...] 'Binary' theories of this sort no longer have anything whatsoever in common with the Manichaean conception of a bitter struggle between two cosmic principles; [...] Such a system [...] is a 'perfect' system whose rationality is supposed, when subjected to to mental scrutiny, to be self-evident" (Lefebvre, 2000: 39).

But crucially, Lefebvre argues, 'where there is space, there is being' (Lefebvre, 2000:22). Like Foucault, Lefebvre contends that 'space is never empty; it always embodies a meaning' (Lefebvre, 2000: 154). In other words, Lefebvre rejects the conception of space as 'a container without a content' and that it should not be conceptualised as an abstract geometrical continuum, independent of subjectivity and agency. As Lefebvre explains it "[I]n seeking to understand the three moment of social space, it may help to consider the body. All the more so inasmuch as the relationship to the space of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa. Considered overall, social practices presuppose the use of the body" (Lefebvre, 2000: 40). Similarly to Foucault, Lefebvre's mode of thought represents a move away from the 'profound somatophobia' of thinking the body where the body, in critical orthodoxy, 'has been regarded as a source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason' (Grosz, 1994: 5). With regard to the critique of this mode of somatophobic thinking, Grosz (1994) is the latest in a long lineage of thinkers who have argued that the body has traditionally been regarded a trap or a prison for a noncorporeal being. The body as *matter* (*res extensa*)– a denigrated Form – is regarded in Western philosophy as the traitor of reason and the mind (*res cognitans*), a thinking substance. The body then is the subordinated or negated second term of dichotomous thinking characteristic of Western philosophy insofar as the mind/body opposition correlates to a practice of thought that operates in binarised (dualistic) terms where man/woman, self/other, inside/outside are similarly aligned. The body, as Grosz has argued, has to be refigured as a body-subject – a corporeal being and a socio-cultural artefact. Thus construed, the body-subject is 'the material condition of

subjectivity, that is, the locus and the site of inscription for specific modes of subjectivity' (Grosz, 1998: 42).[12] The materiality of the body as an animate 'thing' in/as space is thus understood as not being reducible to a thing, 'it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object which somehow contains and coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects' (Grosz, 1994: xi).

In addition, Lefebvre also insists '[...] that there is a politics of space because space is political' (Lefebvre, 1976a: 33). As indicated, a way of thinking how space embodies meaning, how it embodies and receives being is through the nestling of the body in space. In short, embodiment mediates our existence in social space. It is through the ways that the body-subject is secured in different spaces that space is political. In other words, an account of space also has to take into consideration the relationship between the body and space, the formation of subjectivity as it relates to and is constituted by the formation of space. Embodied subjects place themselves into topographies of meaning, identity and power which places values on certain aspects of bodies and subjectivities more highly than others. For example, if we looked at colonial spatiality, the formation of a dominant space by the colonial regime intervenes and re-present the embodied subject and subjectivities in specific ways and as a result of which, the colonised subject learns to read their self off from the reflection they see in this 'mirror' of colonial space in which they are placed. The ontological shock of dislocation experienced by Fanon, for example, is that of simultaneously being in place and yet out of place. As a result of the discursive practices of colonial Man's production of colonial spatiality, the cathexis of colonised spaces and bodies are simultaneous with the constitution and transfixing of absolute differences and a disavowal of the ethical relation with Other(s). Not only is the colonised subject transfixed, s/he is emptied of being and sealed in a 'crushing

---

[12] Here, I also take Grosz's (1998) understanding of the body which proves to be a useful definition: 'By *body* I understand a concrete, material, animate organisation of flesh, organs, nerves, muscles, and skeletal structure which are given a unity, cohesiveness, and organisation only through their psychical and social inscription as the surface and raw materials of an integrated and cohesive totality. The body is, so to speak, organically / biologically / naturally "incomplete"; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities which require social triggering, ordering and long-term "administration", regulated in each culture and epoch by what Foucault has called "the micro-technologies of power". The body becomes a *human* body [...], a body whose epidermal surface bounds a psychical unity, a body which thereby defines the limits of experience and subjectivity, in psychoanalytic terms, through the intervention of the (m)other, and, ultimately, the Other or Symbolic order' (Grosz, 1998: 43-44).

objecthood', 'overdetermined from without' (Fanon, 1986: 109; 116). For the colonised subject, s/he has no other Self other than as an inscribed self-as-Othered. Colonial spatiality, then, enables the exercise of relations of power and makes possible different forms of subjectivities. Seen in this light, the production and representations of space by dominant powerholders is a conduit through which relations of power are exercised and normalised. Similarly to Foucault, Lefebvre argues that power is ontologically embedded in spatiality and the production of space. He maintains

> power, the power to maintain the relations of dependence and exploitation, does not keep to a defined 'front' at a strategic level [...] Power is everywhere; it is omnipresent, assigned to Being. It is everywhere *in space*. It is in everyday discourse and commonplace notions, as well as in police batons and armoured cars. It is in *objets d'art* as well as in missiles. It is in the diffuse preponderance of the 'visual', as well as in institutions such as the school or parliament. *It is in things as well as in signs* (the signs of objects and object-signs). Everywhere, and therefore nowhere [...] Power has extended its domain right into the interior of each individual, to the roots of consciousness, to the 'topias' hidden in the folds of subjectivity (Lefebvre, 1976:86-7).

In other words, Lefebvre argues that 'space [...] belongs to power. It implies [...] knowledge and power combined and conflated' (Lefebvre, 2000: 157). The discourses of space, then, are productive and generative processes and also a locus of power. Moreover, Lefebvre (2000) argues that the production of social space is legitimated through an ideology. He writes, for example, 'What is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and links it makes use of, and whose code it embodies? [...]More generally speaking, what we call ideology only achieves consistency by intervening in social space and in its production, and by thus taking on body therein. Ideology *per se* might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space' (Lefebvre, 2000: 44).

In other words, critical spatial analysis of socio-spatial production has to be attentive to the way space (re)produces power. Moreover, this analysis has to be attentive to

the way in which the specific production of spaces embody sedimentations of perceptions, representations and practices that are, referred to in Lefebvre's conceptual triad as 'spatial practice', 'representations of space' and 'spaces of representation', indicative of a complex interweaving and simultaneity between the social, the historical and the spatial. This is what Soja (2000) refers to as an ontological shift in that our understandings of the relations between sociality and historicality have to be informed by the pertinence of spatiality.[13] As I understand it, space is political because it contains bodies, because it locates the pluralities of bodies and provides living bodies a place in society, opening up the spaces of obligation and factical life in an encounter with alterity and Otherness. Indeed, Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality provide us a framework with which to understand the fundamental inseparability between the three terms, that is, the subject's embodiment and its relation between sociality, historicality and spatiality as intertwined knowledge sources:

> In seeking to understand the three moments of social space, it may help to consider the body. All the more so inasmuch as the relationship to space of a 'subject' who is a member of a group or society implies his relationship to his own body and vice versa [...] Social practice presupposes the body [...] This is the realm of the perceived [...] As for representations of the body, they derive from accumulated scientific knowledge [...] Bodily lived experience, for its part, may be both highly complex and quite peculiar, because 'culture' intervenes here, with its illusory immediacy, via symbolisms and via Judaeo-Christian tradition, certain aspects of which are covered by psychoanalysis. The 'heart' as lived is strangely different from the heart as thought and perceived (Lefebvre, 2000: 40).

---

[13] In arguing for an 'ontological shift' in our understanding of the pertinence and insertion of spatiality into the relations between historicality and sociality, Soja asserts that this is the 'key to understanding the "trialectics of being"' (Soja, 2000:15). As such, for Soja, this 'thirding' (the ontological intertwining of a trialectic of spatiality-sociality-historicality) is a 'three-sided' way of comprehending the complex interactions of the three terms in the way it informs being. As such, there is no 'a priori privileging of the three terms'. Instead, he argues that this trialectics of being is a modification of Heidegger's and Satre's existential being (Soja, 2000: 14-15). However, Heidegger's conceptualisation of the spatiality of being-in-the-world and its intertwined nature with that of space is much more complex. Instead, Heidegger argues that *Dasein* is not one of spatiality-historicality-sociality but one of *embodiment*. As he notes: ' in feeling oneself to be, the body is already contained in advance of that self, in such a way that the body in its bodily states permeates the self [...] we do not "have" a body; rather, we "are" bodily' and 'we live in that we are embodied' (Heidegger, 1981: 98-99).

As Elden (2001) indicates, in viewing space in three ways (the lived, conceived and perceived), 'the Lefebvrian schema sees a unity between physical, mental and social space' (Elden, 2001: 815). Crucially, as noted, it is through the 'intelligence of the body' that lived, conceived and perceived space is 'marked and ('re-marked'), produced and rendered 'transparent' and that it is through the 'analysing, separating intellect' that space is produced (Lefebvre, 2000: 174).[14] Similarly, for Foucault, it is through this 'intelligence of the body' that Man 'transmits these resemblances back into the world from which he receives them' (Foucault, 1992: 27).[15]

Crucially, in relation to the intertwinement between the body-subject's mental processes and the production of social space, Lefebvre indicates

> On the other hand, who can grasp 'reality' – i.e. social and spatial practice – without starting out from a mental space, without proceeding from the abstract to the concrete? No one (Lefebvre, 2000: 415).

Thus, for Lefebvre, the dualities between physical concrete space and mental space are 'bridged' by the processes 'spatial practices' (defined by Lefebvre as the perceptions of space)[16] and which contributes to another moment in the production of space. According to Lefebvre's argument, spatial practices are founded on the material practices and social relations in everyday life that in turn relate to the sites through which social relations are produced and reproduced. In other words, spatial practices refer to the ways in which space, in its physical form, is generated and used. Spatial practice, as defined by Lefebvre, is 'a projection onto a (spatial) field of

---

[14] Lefebvre declares: 'to say that the qualification of space *depends* on the body implies that space is determined by something that at times threatens and at times benefits it. This determination appears to have three aspects: gestures, traces, marks' (Lefebvre, 2000: 174).

[15] Foucault argues that it is through humanist Man that the 'world' is brought into being. He also suggests that the *human* body 'is always the possible half of a universal atlas'. For example, he declares: 'upright between the surfaces of the universe, [Man] stands in relation to the firmament [...]; but he is also the fulcrum upon which all these relations turn, so that we find them again , their similarity unimpaired, in the analogy of the human animal to the earth it inhabits: his flesh is a glebe, his bones are rocks, his veins great rivers [...]' (Foucault, 1992a: 22).

[16] Soja also defines this as Firstspace (*Perceived space*) as that which is related to perspectivialism and epistemology. He writes, Firstspace 'refers to the directly-experienced world of empirically measurable and mappable phenomena [...] Endogenous approaches explain Firstspace geographies through accurate descriptions [...] the search for recurrent empirical regularities' (Soja, 2000: 17). The key point here is that Firstspace analytics and practices are fixed mainly on the concrete materiality of spatial forms, on 'things' that can be empirically surveyed and mapped.

all aspects, elements and moments of social practice' (Lefebvre, 2000:8). Spatial practice is thus related to the 'observed, described and analysed on a wide range of levels: in architecture, in city planning or 'urbanism' [...] in the actual design of routes and localities [...], in the organisation of everyday life, and, naturally in urban reality' (Lefebvre, 2000: 415-416). For example, Mendieta (2001) expands on Lefebvre by arguing that the conceptualisation of spatial practices should also recognise, for example, the generation of '*lustscapes* or *pornscapes* that match the *consumptioness* that gentrify civic agents. These, in turn, are also to be differentiated from powerscapes and entertainmentscapes [...] that further map the city. Red zone districts, like ghettos of power and powerless, mark bodies by marking zones for the consumption and production of desire, the abjection and policing of the other' (Mendieta, 2001: 205; his emphasis). In short, the spatial practices that contribute to the generation of social space are discerned by the modes in which they are *secreted*:

> The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytical standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space. [...] A spatial practice must have a certain cohesiveness, but this does not imply that it is coherent (in the sense of intellectually worked out or logically conceived) (Lefebvre, 2000: 38).

This does not however imply that spatial practices are only propelled by economic necessity or dictates. Moreover, it does not imply that the spatial practices of a dominant regime of power are fixed. While spatial practices 'are driven by an imaginary of power and the power of the imagination. The monumentality of a Paris, Rome or New York are all defaced, challenged and contested by the graffiti of the people, the murals that give voice to the power of the city, and the contestation of civic space [...]' (Mendieta, 2001: 205). Similarly to Foucault's analysis of relations of power, the power relations that propel spatial practices of a dominant regime of power are not unidirectional – they are opened to contestation. Indeed, the spatial practices that work to produce city-spaces are open to

> struggle between classes, ethnicities, and genders. Cities, in turn, are gatherings of places which are memories of wars and battles, conflicts

> and victories. Cities are also the testament, if not the bequest, of both real and metaphoric struggles [...] for certain ideas, ideologies, or imaginaries (Mendieta, 2001: 205).

In addition, spatial practices are entwined with a projection of reason and is coterminous with the ways in which Western reason 'thinks, images and projects space' (Mendieta, 2001: 203).[17] In other words, these spatial practices are simultaneous with the consolidation, legitimisation and normalisation of social-spatial relations. Once concretized, spatial practices seek to determine social relations while simultaneously conditioning the ways in which space is represented, experienced and lived by the body-subject. For example, the production of city-space is also intimately entwined and co-determined with the actualization of space and philosophising:

> [...] philosophy has been most fundamentally determined by the city, and conversely, that the city is related to the project, or production, of philosophy [...] the city [is] a site in which one may find the traces of practices, representations, and experiences of space [that] is inescapably a product of the philosophical imaginary. Philosophy thinks the city [...] At the same time, however, precisely because the city is the site of sedimentation of practices, representations, and lived experiences, it enacts a philosophical imaginary. Philosophy is enabled as a practice of the imagination but also of the body itself [...] by the city (Mendieta, 2001: 204).

What is suggested from above is the co-constitutive and mutually defining relation between bodies and cities, between (the lived practices of) corporeality and the spatial practices that constitute city-space (Grosz, 1998: 43). However, as Grosz (1998) indicates, the relations between the practices of the body-subject and spatial practices that constitute city-space are much more complex. These relations between the body-subject and the city are neither that of a de facto external relation nor that of a direct causal relation in which the relation is conceived as a one-way

---

[17] Mendieta contends, 'to think is to be where one is not, and to be, in body and soul, is to focus on the moment, on what is present at hand. Yet, thinking is conditioned by space, just as how a space, a place, in turn, is made accessible by a way of thinking' (Mendieta, 2001: 204).

movement, that is to say, the city as a direct reflection, projection or a product of bodies. This mode of thinking retains not only the binary structure of thought but also the residues of Enlightenment humanism in which the body is conceived as merely a tool, a bridge between *res cognitans* and *res extensa*. Secondly, we should also be cautious of formulating the relations between the body and city along the lines of a representational 'parallelism or a isomorphism' (Grosz, 1998: 45) where the relations between the two are understood as analogous or congruent parts where the one is reflected in the other. This mode of thinking, as Grosz (1998) argues, is one that finds its clearest formulation in (Western) liberal political philosophers such as Hobbes' and Locke's formulation of the body-politic, a formulation that simultaneously veils the hidden aspects of phallogocentrism 'inherent in the notion of the universal, the generic human, or the unspecified subject' (Grosz, 1998: 46). Moreover, this mode of thinking continues the binary thinking implicit in the opposition between culture and nature where 'nature is a passivity on which culture as male (cultural) productivity supercedes and overtakes female (natural) reproduction' (Grosz, 1998: 46). As Lefebvre indicates, there is an immediacy in the relations between the body and space, a relation of simultaneity between the

> body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before producing effects in the material realm [...], before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space (Lefebvre, 2000: 170).

Thus construed, it would be possible to conceive the body-subject as a hinge, the *point de capiton* in the production of meaning, which introduces the dimension of the political. In other words, the simultaneous co-constitution of the social symbolic articulated around the *point de capiton* is co-relational with the attendant constitution of the body-subject's subjectivity and/as corporeality:

> Everything radiates out from and is organised around this signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of material. It's the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and retrospectively (Lacan, 1993: 268)

Thus construed, as a nodal point, the body-subject's spatial practices and the social-symbolic is constituted in a two-way movement[18], which is not merely a matter of direct mirroring of a pre-existing objective reality but that of a hegemonic struggle of both real and metaphoric struggles 'for certain ideas, ideologies or imaginaries' (Mendieta, 2001: 205). Put simply, the body-subject as a hinge, as a *point de capiton*, is conceived as a site and a space around which there is a takeover of the body, a body that is saturated, 'reexplored, transformed, contested [and] reinscribed' by images and representational systems (Grosz, 1998: 47). Correspondingly, as a *point de capiton*, the body-subject's corporeal exertion and spatial practices re-negotiates, reinscribes and contests the limits of the city – the city as a site of spatialised power relations that is moreover, 'the site for the body's cultural saturation' (Grosz, 1998: 47).

There are then no mediating terms between the body and space. Space, then, is not merely a passive background or a container but actively constitutive of relations between bodies. In Lefebvre's (2000) account, the body produces itself and produces space, each body is deployed in and occupies space. At the same time, each body is and has space – in effect, body-space. Put differently, it is through my body that I inhabit space, it is through my body that I be-in-place and it is through the body that the 'I' as embodied subject have access to spatiality. The body, then, is the threshold to the visible world. It is through the body that the 'I' as embodied subject is worlded and made present to itself. It is through the body, as a mode of access, that the 'I' is able to perceive and relate to other bodies, to other subjectivities. However, as Grosz (1994) indicates by recourse to Merleau-Ponty, this *postural schema* of the body is not an isolated being, it is relational in that it 'necessarily involves the relations between the body, the surrounding space, other objects and bodies [...]' (Grosz, 1994: 85). In other words, my body, the spatiality of my body together with my emplacement in the social space is thus pure relationality. Simply, in Merleau-

---

[18] Lacan, as Stavrakakis (1999) and other Lacanians have indicated, was well aware of the two-way movement between the subject and the social symbolic and his approach has been a deconstruction of 'the whole essentialist division between the two'. In short, for Lacanians, the socio-political conception of subjectivity is not reduced to an *individuality nor* is it to be understood simplistically as the 'application' of a Lacanian-derived tool-kit for the analysis of socio-political issues. Rather, as Mouffe (1993: 3) has argued, 'the political cannot be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific type of sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition' (Mouffe, 1993: 3).

Ponty's understanding, the spatiality of the body's situation is the very condition of possibility for our access to and conception of space:

> The word "here" applied to my body does not refer to a determinate position in relation to other positions or to external coordinates, but the laying down of the first co-ordinates, the anchoring of the active body in an object, the situation of the body in face of its tasks. Bodily space can be distinguished from external space and envelop its parts instead of spreading them out [...] the body image is finally a way of stating that my body is in-the-world. As far as spatiality is concerned [...] one's own body is the third term [...] in the figure-background structure, and every figure stands out against the double horizon of external and bodily space [...] By considering the body in movement, we can see better how it inhabits space (Merleau-Ponty, 2000: 100-102).

For Merleau-Ponty, the corporeal schema is the condition of possibility for the subject's access to the visible world. The specular embodied subject only has access to the visible through his/her body, a body-as-it-is-lived and a body that is worlded as unified by this scopic Gestalt. However, in a moment that recalls Foucault and Lefebvre, Merleau-Ponty also asserts that the body is neither simply object nor subject, it is relational in that it receives its meaning from other spatially and visually situated sense-bestowing, form-giving 'objects'. It is through the bodily-being-in-the-world that meaning and knowledge is generated. For Merleau-Ponty (2000), it is the subject's identification with the bodily image that is crucial in the constitution of an ideal-I, by which subjectivity is attained. What Merleau-Ponty offers is his emphasis on the lived experience of the body-subject, particularly the body-subject's entwinement with vision and corporeality. Interestingly, for Merleau-Ponty, the recognition of this ideal-I, that is, the recognition and identification with the image of a unified body in the mirror is also at once a misrecognition of the Other as the Self, a mirage of the seeming coherence of the 'I' as body-subject introducing a dehiscence to essentialist notions of subjectivity:

> the acquisition not only of a new content but of a new function as well: the narcissistic function [...] At the same time that the image of oneself makes possible the knowledge of oneself, it makes possible a sort of alienation [...] the general function of the specular image would be to

> tear us away from our immediate reality; it would be a 'de-realizing' function [...] inevitably there is a conflict between *me* as I feel myself and the *me* as I see myself or as others see me. The specular image will be, among other things, the first occasion for agressiveness towards others manifest to itself [...] The acquisition of a specular image, therefore, bears not only on our relations of understanding but also on our relations of being, with the world and with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 136-7).

Similarly, with regard to the embodied subject, Lefebvre suggests that 'one truly gets the impression that every shape in space, every spatial plane, constitutes a mirror and produces a mirage effect; that within each body the rest of the world is reflected, and referred back to, in an ever-renewed to-and-from of reciprocal reflection' (Lefebvre, 2000: 183). Lefebvre indicates a dual investment between the spatiality of the body-subject and that of social space, that is to say, he suggests that there is a direct simultaneity between the formation of the 'I' as sovereign presence with that of space:

> On the one hand, one...relates oneself to space, situates oneself *in space*. One *confronts* both an immediacy and an objectivity of one's own. One places oneself at the *centre*, *designates oneself, and uses oneself as a measure.* One is, in short, a subject...On the other hand, space serves as an intermediary or mediating role: beyond each plane surface, beyond each opaque form, 'one' seeks to apprehend something else. This tends to turn social space into a transparent medium occupied solely by light, by 'presences' and influences (Lefebvre, 2000: 182-3).

Here, Lefebvre's conceptualises space as productive in the placing and worlding of the body-subject as presence, productive of an egological and sovereign 'I'. As the seeming centre and the measure, the subject's sense of himself as self-coinciding and worlded 'I' is made possible as a body extended in the mirror of social space: 'the Ego contemplating itself in the glass, and either discovering itself or slipping into narcissism. The power of a landscape [...] presents any susceptible viewer with an image at once true and false of a creative capacity which the subject (Ego) is able, during a moment of marvellous self-deception, to claim as his own' (Lefebvre, 2000: 189). Echoing the Lacanian mirror stage, Lefebvre suggests that this spatial and

bodily identification of the embodied subject as egological 'I' occurs and is made possible by visuality. In short, the worlding of the 'I' as presence and sovereign is made available by this scopic Gestalt. Thus, these visual-spatio practices simultaneously make possible, what can only be construed as, a worlding and presencing of the subject as sovereign. Lefebvre, for example, suggests that spatial-bodily identification occurs through the entirety of the body in terms of bodily spatial processes wherein visuality plays a crucial role in the constitution of the embodied subject as unified and sovereign: "[W]hen 'Ego' arrives in an unknown land or city, he first experiences it through every part of the body [...] For it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced" (Lefebvre, 2000: 162). Considered overall, Lefebvre seems to suggest that it is through the practices of vision via a bodily identification with space that enables a condition of possibility for the inauguration of the subject's sovereign identity, namely, a worlding of the subject as sovereign and presence.

Similarly to Lacan, Lefebvre suggests that this production of a unified and self-coinciding ideal-I is also an illusion. While the practices of the visible underpinning the representations of space and spatial practices ensure that (social) space is seemingly like a mirror, transparent and mappable, apparently assuring that the ontologisation of the 'Eye/I' is unified and coherent, however, for Lefebvre, this is also fundamentally an illusion: '[T]he power of a landscape does not derive from the fact that it offers itself as spectacle, but rather *from* the fact that, as a mirror or mirage, it presents any susceptible viewer with an image at once true and false of a creative capacity which the subject (or Ego) is able, during a moment of marvellous self-deception, to claim as his own' (Lefebvre, 2000: 189).[19] Suggested from the above is the imbrication of the practices of vision with the representations of space and spatial practices, practices that, as *loci of relations* of power, are simultaneous with a *presencing* of the subject as self-coinciding sovereign subject, as egological 'I'. But this presencing and worlding of the specular sovereign subject is, for

[19] Briefly, according to Lacan, the mirror stage 'situates the agency of the ego [...] in a fictional direction [...] The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identifications, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I call orthopaedic' (Lacan, 1997: 2; 4). But as Lacan also indicates, this inauguration of the subject is a captivating lure and based on a misrecognition. The illusion of unified subjectivity 'is a mirage [of] the maturation of his powers [...] given to him only as a Gestalt [...] this Gestalt [...] symbolizes the mental performance of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination' (Lacan, 1997: 2).

Lefebvre, an illusion. As indicated, the formation and worlding of the 'I' as sovereign and unified subject is riven by a fundamental dehiscence at the heart of subjectivity, which is framed around an illusion of autonomy to which it entrusts itself.

However, spatial practice and representations of space are but two of the three key moments intrinsic to the Borromean knot of the production of space and thus have to be distinguished from the 'spaces of representation'. Echoing Foucault's heterotopias, Lefebvre refers to spaces of representations as 'the lived spaces' of "'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists" (Lefebvre, 2000: 39).[20] While Lefebvre acknowledges that these are the spaces of subjection and the dominated,[21] Lefebvre also indicates, very similarly to Foucault's conceptualisation of heterotopias, that these spaces of representation (*les espaces de representation*) are the spaces appropriated by the imagination 'to change and appropriate' (Lefebvre, 2000: 39). As such, these spaces of representation 'overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects [and] tend[s] towards more or less concrete systems of non-verbal symbols and signs' (Lefebvre, 2000: 39). In a remark that recalls Foucault's heterotopias, Lefebvre writes

> representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently, it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or

---

[20] Lefebvre's spaces of representation (*les espaces de representation*) are otherwise referred to in the English translation as 'representational spaces' (see Soja, 1996; also Soja, 2000). Moreover, Soja conceptualises Lefebvre's 'spaces of representation'/'representational spaces' as Thirdspace which, for Soja, refers to a 'critical thirding' or a 'critical thirding-as-Othering' which he sees as a development of Lefebvre's *dialectique de triplicite* (Soja, 2000; see also Elden, 2001 for a critique of Soja's conceptualisation of Thirdspace). As indicated, Homi Bhabha too has developed his version of 'the Third Space' which he argues denotes a space of radical openness and 'hybridity', a term that he uses to denote the spaces of resistance (Bhabha, 1990).

[21] As was indicated, this is also pertinent to colonised spaces. Racial and sexual subjectification also circumscribe these lived spaces of representation that allow or disallow one to inhabit one's own social space, that conditions and determines one's own being-in-place, one's own locatedness in one's own body and social space. Recall Fanon whose work indicates that the colonised body-subject's space of representation is not his/her own. This is because colonial spatiality has determined that the representational lived space of the colonised body-subject is no longer in his or her own possession. As was also indicated, s/he sees himself from a position other than his/her own – s/he is overdetermined from without. As a result of this epistemic and material violence, for the colonised, this results in a split subjectivity.

> relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic (Lefebvre, 2000: 42).

These spaces of representation are, for Lefebvre, alive, fluid and dynamic and this is so because they are also the spaces of the body-subject, the spaces that are occupied and modified by the body that intervenes in social space in which the agency of the body-subject is a 'lived' combination of 'perceived' and 'conceived'. Consequently, it is through the motility of the bodily, through the body-subject's insertion into the factical life of lived everyday experiences – our embodiment as beings-in-the-world intrinsically entwined with being-with-others – that our lived existence, our spaces of representation are mediated and modified. In this respect, although these are the spaces of subjection and subjectification, the space of the 'dominated' (Lefebvre, 2000: 39) made possible by the plays of power, by spatial practices and representations of space, these spaces of representations (Thirdspace) are also the conditions of possibility, of productivity in terms of subject-constitution. Lefebvre suggests that it is the imagination that makes possible these attempts to modify and appropriate these spaces laid down by the dominant powerholders (Lefebvre, 2000: 39).

While Lefebvre suggests that space is a product of the codified and instrumental logic of modern power which has been implemented by specific groups of people, for example, city planners and bureaucrats, he also suggests that space is a product of the human body. In other words, while space is a product of perception and conception, space is not simply the physical imposition and locus of subjection upon the embodied subject. While the dominant form of the representations of space and spatial practices seek to impose an organised degree of cohesion, lurking within these generations of spaces are also contradictory tendencies for fragmentation and disintegration: "[S]patial practice regulates life – it does not create it. Space has no power 'in itself', nor does space as such determine spatial contradictions. These are the contradictions of society – contradictions between one thing and another within society, as for example between the forces and relations of production – that emerge in space, at the level of space, and so engender the contradictions of space" (Lefebvre, 2000: 358). Indeed, while bodies are co-opted and confined in spaces by relations of power, the embodied subject is also the site of resistance. Intimated by

Lefebvre's spaces of representation is that resistance also emanates from the body-subject with its corporeal ability to produce and modify space. Indeed, these spaces of representation evade the 'logic of visualisation' and the desire for visibility inherent in the dominant form of spatial practices and representations of space. In another echo of Foucault's heterotopias, Lefebvre conceives these spaces of representation as 'embodying complex symbolisms [...] linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, and also art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces)' (Lefebvre, 2000: 33). Thus construed, the body enables Lefebvre 'to treat social practice as an extension of the body, an extension which comes about as part of space's development in time, and thus too as part of a historicity itself conceived of as produced' (Lefebvre, 2000: 249).

In his 'quest for a counter-space' (Lefebvre, 2000: 383), it seems that Lefebvre is interested in the nature and practices of resistances. The exercise of relations of power, then, does not merely press down on the subject – not merely 'pressing the subject into subordination' (Butler, 1997:3). This recalls Foucault who argues that power is productive as it is essential to the formation, the persistence and the continuity of the subject. To reiterate, in the Foucauldian formulation, the subject is formed, is constituted by power that insofar as power forms the subject it also provides the very condition of the subject's existence and the trajectory of desire for the otherwise. Indeed, power is 'not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are' (Butler, 1997: 2). In the Lefebvrian schema, these spaces of representation as the 'third sees space as produced and modified over time and through its use, spaces invested with symbolism and meaning, the space of *connaissance* (less formal and more local forms of knowledge)' (Elden, 2001: 816) in which practices of resistances are made possible by the embodied subject in lived, social life. The embodied body-subject, as an inhabitant and user of these spaces of representation, is thus to be understood as an *expressive* body-subject that inserts itself directly into lived space and reveals itself through everyday perceptions, gestures and symbols. Thus construed, the subject's body is not merely matter, a part of passive nature ruled by an active mind. Rather, as *point de capiton*, the

expressiveness of body-subject could be better understood as the ground of human action.

What Lefebvre makes available is that spatiality has to be understood in relation to the corporeal dimension of human existence. In addition, what Lefebvre also allows me to think through is that the subject is understood as a body-subject, always situated in a concrete, lived experience, in the lived factical spaces of obligation opened up in everyday life associated with the inevitable encounter with alterity, thus raising questions, at the same time, about living with forms of Otherness. Further, the body-subject has to be understood as constituted by and constitutive of discursive practices of spatiality – both producer and product. The materiality and the spatiality of the body-subject is thus a site of practices of power that renders it intelligible and a site of subject formation and subjection made possible. The question that begs to be asked: how can agency and resistance be understood and defended by the body-subject if the body-subject is also to be understood as an effect of subjection? The paradox, then, is that it is through the processes of subjection that the subject begins 'to objectify his own self, constituting himself as a subject and, at the same time, binding himself to a power of external control' (Agamben, 1998: 119). Levinas expresses this paradox rather succinctly when he says:

> Man's essence lies no longer in freedom but in a kind of bondage [...] Chained to his body, man sees himself refusing the power to escape from himself. Truth is no longer for him the contemplation of a foreign spectacle; instead it consists in a drama in which man sees himself as actor. It is under the weight of his whole existence, which includes facts on which there is no going back, that man will say his yes or his no (Levinas, 1990: 70).

Before proceeding to the next section where I briefly consider the Lacanian gaze, it should be noted that Lefebvre issues a warning that the conceptual triad loses all force if it is treated as an abstract and formal schematic for critical spatial analysis. Lefebvre writes:

> it is reasonable to assume that spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according

> to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period. Relations between the three moments of the perceived, the conceived and the lived are never either simple or stable (Lefebvre, 2000: 46).

In other words, this conceptual triad should not be taken as a reductive schema with which to read and explain all spatiality. Rather than seeing it as a concrete framework, Lefebvre's conceptual triad should be understood instead as 'an initial schema [and] a laying of ground for future work' (Elden, 2001: 812). As Elden argues, to regard this schema as an absolute risks casting Lefebvre's philosophy of spatiality into 'a new orthodoxy'. Moreover, the reduction and calcification of Lefebvre's conceptual schema also amounts to blunting his philosophical complexity in all its nuances (Elden, 2001: 810-816). Admittedly, for all the difficulties in sustaining any absolute distinction between Lefebvre's three categories, they nevertheless help us understand the overall and complex problematic in addressing the production of space.

Lacan and the gaze

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to Lacan, and particularly his conception of the gaze. I do this because, firstly, Bhabha's theorisation of the colonial gaze is partly indebted to the Lacanian formulation and therefore necessitates a return to Lacan in order to re-evaluate this thinker but on different terms. Secondly, because this chapter represents the first stage in the exploration of the practices of vision, I turn to Lacan because I do not think any account of vision cannot at the very least cast a glance in Lacan's direction even though if one's subsequent exploration of the practices of vision diverges from the Lacanian formulation of the gaze. But this section also represents a very broad yet particular reading of Lacan's conceptualisation of the gaze. It is particular because this section's reading of Lacan begins to explore his conception of the gaze in relation to Merleau-Ponty's account. But it is also broad because this is only necessarily a short excursion as I do not have the space to enter into this fruitful path in any great detail. Thus, this research into the theoretical homologies and divergences between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty

will have to be deferred to a future project.[22] Consequently, for the purpose here, I want to emphasise that in no way does this section represent an exhaustive critical interlocution into the Lacanian gaze and its divergence from that of Merleau-Ponty's. However, what this section allows me to think through, albeit broadly, is the gaze as it relates to the invisible.

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan presents an account of the gaze. Indeed, in his assessment of the gaze, more than once, Lacan (1973) acknowledges his indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and The Invisible*. The gaze, as Lacan explains, is not on the side of the specular subject; it is the gaze of the Other. Instead of being on the side and in the possession of the specular subject, the gaze is an object of the scopic drive. By being on the side of the object, the gaze functions as an *objet petit a*: '[*T*]*he objet a in the field of the visible is the gaze*' (Lacan, 1973: 105). However, while the gaze is not the property of the specular subject, it is not the property of objects, in that it is not the property of material things either. The gaze is not on the side of the visible itself. It has no specular image. Rather, it seems to be something invisible: '[W]hat exists is the split between what one sees and the gaze, a gaze which is neither apprehensible nor visible, a blind gaze which is erased from the world. It is exactly in this way that the drive manifests itself in the scopic order' (Quinet, 1995: 139). The gaze as *objet a* marks a missed encounter. It does not represent or describe any positive phenomenon but it represents a discontinuity or lack in a structure. In short, the *objet a* was Lacan's term for the object of lack or the missing object that would satisfy the drive for plenitude, which is underpinned by a desire that is dependent on an inherent lack of the subject who desires, but who also desires to suture this lack.

The gaze, as conceptualised by Lacan, thus marks the limits of formalization. In other words, the *a* in the gaze qua *objet petit a* denotes that the object can never be obtained. Because it is at the limits of the symbolic, in the sense that it marks the limits of formalization, the gaze qua object belongs to the category of the real. The real is like the thing-itself, it is unknowable, unassimilable and unsymbolizable, without an ontic mask. In Lacanian terms, the real denotes the impossible –

---

[22] For a broad summary of the relations between Lacan and Merleau-Ponty in which they read and commented on each other's work one could turn to, for example, Phillips (1996).

impossible to integrate in the symbolic order, impossible to imagine and impossible to attain (Lacan, 1973: 166-168). Accordingly, the gaze as formulated by Lacan undermines the perceptual faith of the *sujet suppose savoir*[23] because the gaze qua object 'unsettles empiricism and sets in motion the (re)appearance of gaps, fadings, and flickerings in our perception and understanding. Much of the difficulty surrounding discussions of the eye/gaze distinction derive from Lacan's embracement, rather than effacement, of paradoxes and contradictions [...] the gaze is troubling. It introduces paradox into perception' (Saper, 1991: 43). Crucially, it is Merleau-Ponty's reflections on vision that helped Lacan formulate his conceptualisation of the gaze. According to Lacan, Merleau-Ponty's step forward was 'forcing the limits of phenomenology [...] the essential point – the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer [...] What we have to circumscribe, by means of the path he indicates for us, is the pre-existence of a gaze' (Lacan, 1973: 71-72). Echoing Merleau-Ponty, Lacan continues to observe, 'I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides. It is no doubt this *seeing*, to which I am subjected in an original way, that must lead us to the aims of this work, to that ontological turning back, the bases of which are no doubt to be found in a more primitive institution of form' (Lacan, 1973: 72). For Lacan, it is Merleau-Ponty's concept of the invisible, which Lacan specifies with regard to Merleau-Ponty's account of the gaze, in terms of the division between the seer (the Eye/I) and the gaze, and which represents the step forward in the conceptualisation of the gaze. Merleau-Ponty draws to our attention to the dependence of the visible on a gaze that precedes it, a gaze that opens up the visible and introduces something beyond the visible, the radical alterity of the invisible. In addition, for Merleau-Ponty, to be seer (see-er) is also to partake in visibility, to be of the visible: '[T]through our eyes we are for ourselves fully visible' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 143). Moreover, as indicated earlier, for Merleau-Ponty, it is through the bodily, the postural schema within which vision is situated that makes possible the subject's access to the visible world, including the possibility of subject-formation and the worlding of the body-subject.

---

[23] The term *sujet suppose savoir* is used by Lacan to designate the illusion of self-coinciding consciousness, a subject supposedly that is transparent to itself in its act of knowing and which is inaugurated in the mirror stage. Sheridan (1997) translates this as 'subject supposed to know' while

While Merleau-Ponty states '[I]t is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible [...] an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 130), he also intimates that the visible envelops us, clothes us and makes possible a continuation of the worlding of my body by binding my body to the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 131). For Lacan, it is this peculiar independence of the visible world in which vision occurs only under the pervading experience of a gaze which comes from things themselves that interest Lacan. But in another passage, Merleau-Ponty explains further, 'he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world he looks at [...] it is necessary that the vision [...] be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 134). Here, Merleau-Ponty begins to formulate his thesis of reversibility in the form of a chiasmic intertwinement. For Merleau-Ponty, there is a reversibility in the domain of visual perception and this includes subjectivity. With his conceptualisation of the visible as chiasmically intertwined with invisible, Merleau-Ponty brings our attention to what we could call the dependence of the visible on a gaze that 'precedes' it, a gaze that that denotes a radical alterity, an invisible Other that compels us, that draws us out of our Selves and which introduces a strangeness to the seeming coherence of the egological 'I': '[T]he performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he feels himself, and the others feel him to be at service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must "dash on his bow" to follow it [...] the surface of the visible, is doubled up over its whole extension with an invisible reserve [...] by a sort of folding back, invagination' (Merleau-Ponty , 1968: 151-152).

What Merleau-Ponty's thinking makes available is this: while the subject-in-formation is made possible by the visible, to be made visible by a gaze is also to open up to an alterity that is unknowable, to an invisible that indicates an opening to and an acknowledgment of a strange 'relation' to an alterity: [I]n a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who was looking at the forest. I felt, on certain days, that it was rather the trees that were looking at me' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 167). While I look at things, I am also looked at. I am also an object of the gaze. The 'I' is made

---

Schneiderman (1980: vii) translates it as 'supposed subject of knowledge', thereby also indicating that it is the subject, not merely knowledge, that is supposed.

strange by the encounter with the Other's otherness. The I Am Who I Am stumbles and falls in this encounter with radical alterity. My activity then is also passivity: 'one no longer knows who sees and who is seen, who paints and who is painted' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 167). Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest that the specular subject (the seer) is haunted by the gaze of the Other, namely the radical alterity of an Other, an invisible that seduces us and captivates us. In being haunted and made strange in the encounter with the radical alterity of an Other, the seer is reversed into the observed, the seen and yet intertwined with and enveloped by the gaze, the invisible: 'the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that, as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equal passivity [...] but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen' (Merleau-Ponty , 1968: 139).

Similarly, Lacan states, 'I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides' (Lacan, 1973: 72). However, this being looked at from all sides, the reversal of the observer into the observed recall the terror and anxiety evoked by the Foucauldian all-seeing, panoptic gaze. Lacan's formulation of the gaze recalls this anxiety of being haunted by a peculiar invisibility that comes from an Other, 'to catch in its trap, the observer [...] to capture the subject [in] an obvious relation with desire' (Lacan, 1973: 92). Suggested by Lacan's conception of the gaze is that it is through the gaze that 'I' as subject is rendered visible: '[I]n the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture' (Lacan, 1973: 106). The seer is thus rendered as the seen. But it is also through the gaze that I am made subject, represented and enframed: '[W]hat determines me at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which [...] I am *photo-graphed*' (Lacan, 1973: 106). Echoing Merleau-Ponty, Lacan suggests that in the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in

> an antinomic way – on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them. This is how one should understand those words, so strongly stressed, in the Gospel, They have eyes that

> they might not see. That they might not see what? Precisely, that things are looking at them (Lacan, 1973: 109).

To rehearse again, as conceptualised by Lacan, the gaze is on the side of the object: 'in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture' (Lacan, 1973: 106). It is from the gaze that I am captured and to which I am subjected. But because the gaze is on the side of the Other, the 'I' consequently encounters the lack at the heart of subjectivity. This is because the gaze is not the property of the subject, it comes from an Other. For Lacan, the gaze qua *objet petit a* is something to which the 'I' is subjected and which spells, as intimated, the annihilation of the subject (Lacan, 1973: 73-88). Lacan's discussion of the anamorphic blot in Holbein's *The Ambassadors* serves to illustrate the disparity between the sovereign subject (the seer) who is *subject suppose savoir* and the gaze as object. From the orthodox point of view, the subject who sees shares the Ambassadors' perceptual faith and confidence – the seer (Eye/I) who is master of all he surveys: '[T]he spectacle of the world, in this sense appears to us all-seeing. This is the fantasy to be found in the Platonic perspective of absolute being' (Lacan, 1973: 75). However, some incomprehensible shadowy object lurks in the foreground of *The Ambassadors*. Only when we look at it obliquely, looking at it awry, do we realise that it is a skull: 'it reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head [...] In this matter of the visible, everything is a trap' (Lacan, 1973: 92-93). The anamorphic blot, for Lacan, expresses the subject trapped in a visual field it cannot master. In the anamorphic blot there is, then, a blind-spot in the perceptual faith of the subject. Something is insecurable, not comprehensible. The gaze as illustrated by Lacan's discussion of the anamorphic blot highlights how something catches us off guard, disconcerting us and points to the impossibility of full symbolization. However, Lacan 'does not suggest that anamorphosis is itself the gaze; its dynamic, catching us off guard with a mark of death, simply explains how the gaze works [...] The inability to find a fit, or to locate the eye in the body (human, political, and so forth) disconcerts subjects' (Saper, 1991: 44). As Lacan illustrates in this discussion of *The Ambassadors*, the gaze qua *objet petit a* is 'the underside of consciousness' (Lacan, 1973: 82) reminding us of the limits of our epistemic self-coincidence by introducing an anxiety to perceptual faith:

> Lacan says that the gaze is always present in manifestations of anxiety.

> Without *objet a*, he says, there is no anxiety [...] We can see something of the phenomenon of the double when we gaze in the mirror but don't recognise ourselves. There is an odd moment of anxiety which is also present in the uncanny. In both experiences there is a presence that makes us feel gazed at when nothing is there. But in such circumstances, something is functioning: the screen of the image is filled, and we can catch glimpses of the gaze that fills us with anxiety (Quinet, 1995: 144).

For Lacan, the gaze allows us to understand that the constitution of the coherent 'I' as self-coinciding subject is fundamentally based on a misrecognition, a *mesconnaissance* (Lacan, 1973: 83). As Lacan explains in his discussion of the mirror stage as formative of the 'I' (Lacan, 1997), the notion that the subject is a unified and sovereign 'I' 'is a mirage [of] the maturation of his powers [...] given to him only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly constituent than constituted [...] this Gestalt [...] symbolises the mental performance of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination' (Lacan, 1997: 2). In other words, the Lacanian conception of the subject moves beyond essentialist notions of subjectivity. This conceptualisation of the gaze is crucial in the understanding of subjectivity, especially in terms of a decentring of sovereign subjectivity because the "Lacanian subject becomes relevant for every philosophical discussion of the political exactly because it is not identical to the 'individual' or the 'conscious subject' presupposed in everyday discourse, but also implied in traditional Anglo-American philosophy and political analysis [...] Most of these accounts of subjectivity reduce the subject to the ego. And the Lacanian subject [...] is definitely not reducible to the ego" (Stavrakakis, 1999: 17).

Similarly to Lacan, Merleau-Ponty's thesis of reversibility amplifies and destabilises the perceptual faith and illusory mastery of the seer. Reversibility undermines the essentialist notion of self-grounding, sovereign subjectivity: '[T]he perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all rationality, all value and existence' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 13). This thesis of reversibility and of chiasmic intertwinement lies at the heart of Merleau-Ponty's thinking of subjectivity. While he argues that 'there is a fundamental narcissism in all vision' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 39), his

conceptualisation of reversible subjectivity seeks to undermine this notion of self-grounding egological sovereign subjectivity. To be a seer is to partake in a visibility, to be visible oneself. Yet, just as I see, I am also seen. I am given-to-be-seen by something outside myself. I am thus the observed, a seen. This given to be seen also exposes the inevitable finitude in the sovereign egological 'I' of essentialist notions of subjectivity: '[T]o touch *oneself*, to see *oneself*, [...] is not to apprehend oneself as an ob-ject, it is to be open to oneself, destined to oneself (narcissism) – Nor, therefore, is it to reach *oneself*, it is on the contrary to escape *oneself*, to be ignorant of *oneself*, the self in question is by divergence (*d'ecart*)' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 249).

Central to *The Visible and The Invisible* is the undermining of perceptual faith, which Merleau-Ponty theorises via his thesis of reversibility conceptualised as 'flesh'. Flesh is 'a sort of dehiscence', an *ecstasy* (or *ecart*) that 'opens my body in two' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123). Flesh indicates the inherent relationality and reciprocity of human being-with-others.[24] This is because, for Merleau-Ponty, the human subject is inherently interactional and not monadic. Flesh opens a comprehension that the subject's relation to the world and to others is oriented from the very beginning in terms of its being-in-the-world co-relational with a being-with-others. For the purpose here, because of the parameters of the present work, suffice it to say, suggested by Merleau-Ponty's thesis of reversibility is that of a chiasmic intertwinement of subjectivity: the subject's being in the world is always already co-related and fundamentally entwined with its relation to the subjectivity of Other(s): 'my eyes which see, my hands which touch, can also be seen and touched' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 123). The Other's otherness introduces a strangeness, by which the 'I' is displaced, reversed. Crucially, what is opened up by this chiasmic entwinement is reciprocity of relations to which we called to, to which we are obliged to submit to. What is opened up and suggested by flesh are the embodied spaces of representation, the spaces that open up a poetics of obligation, itself opened up by factical embodied life, the 'surface upon which you and I stand: the obligation I have to you (and you to me, but this is different) and both of "us" to "others". Even the

---

[24] The confines of space and the parameters of this current work do not allow me to explore this further. However, I can point the reader to some theoretical work in this area, for example, Lefort (1990) and Levin (1990). Levin's work (1990) for example goes some way toward examining Merleau-Ponty's thesis of flesh in terms of justice and the ethical relationship.

notion of "others" must be spread out and disseminated, so as to include not only other human beings but what is other than human – animals, e.g., or other living things generally, and even the earth itself [...] The power of obligation varies directly with the powerlessness of the one who calls for help, which is the power of the powerless' (Caputo, 1993: 5). But how are 'we' to proceed with 'our' obligation to the Other(s) especially as 'soon as we come to be we find ourselves (*sich befinden*) enmeshed in obligations' (Caputo, 1993: 7). As Caputo indicates elliptically, we have to poeticize differently (Caputo, 1993: 10) especially when undecidability accompanies every possible decision. And as Derrida indicates, this also means that '[W]e must begin wherever we are and the thought of the trace [...] has taught us that it was impossible to justify the point of departure absolutely. Wherever we are: in a text where we already believe ourselves to be' (Derrida, 1997a: 162). For Caputo this starting from *wherever we are* also means that while, in Derridean terms, the very condition of decision is an impossible one, the best decision is thus an 'impossible' one as it has to be accompanied by an obligation to Justice which calls for 'keeping watch for everything that the law excludes and forgets, so that one writes laws that keep the law in question, in an ongoing jurisprudence of the almost ineffable' (Caputo, 1993: 88).

In sum, what Merleau-Ponty allows me to think through in this section is that flesh qua reversibility opens up the sovereign subject who is destined to escape the egological self. Secondly, flesh qua reversibility introduces the dimension of the otherwise of the visible. Flesh undermines perceptual faith and introduces and opens up an incommensurability-vision of alterity. Radical alterity, introduced by flesh is however nothing finite, graspable or perceptually constituted. It belongs on the side of excess, an invisibility. But flesh also introduces the element of reciprocity, of the body-subject's being-with-others, opening up spaces of obligation to alterity and heterogeneity, to the Other(s) that are not the Same. Flesh, which is the chiasm, the intertwinement of the visible with that of the invisible locates the spaces of representation and of obligation to radical alterity and to forms of Otherness. What is the invisible but that which calls for, and opens up, a radical relation with the radically non-relational?

But also indicated, flesh qua reversibility decentres the egological subject in which the sovereign 'I' becomes a question unto itself. As indicated, in Merleau-Ponty's thesis of reversibility, the seer is reversed into the seen by the gaze that precedes it, by the invisible: 'he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 134). But to be possessed by the visible is also to be a *cogito* dispossessed. In other words, for Merleau-Ponty, 'I am a self-presence that is an absence from self' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 250). In brief, Merleau-Ponty's thesis of flesh qua reversibility is concerned with grappling with 'the problem of sameness and otherness (*le meme et l'autre*), of identity and difference and of the One and its Other, of *ipseity* and *alterity*' (Madison, 1990: 29). One of the stakes involved in *The Visible and The Invisible* was, for Merleau-Ponty, the decentring of sovereign subjectivity, the 'overcoming of modern subjectivism and modern solipsism in general [...] At the same time, it allows him to hold a renewed conception of subjectivity, one that, precisely, introduces alterity into the very definition of subjective "selfsameness". For what is flesh, qua *reversibility*' (Madison, 1990: 31). Subjectivity as conceptualised by Merleau-Ponty is understood in terms of reversibility, *ecart* and divergence, 'nothing other than *the presence of the other in the same* [...] the trace of the other, the inscription of the other in the subject's own selfhood [...] *the subject is for itself an other*' (Madison, 1990: 31). This reversibility of the seer into the seen where one 'no longer knows who sees and who is seen' is that of a chiasmic entwinement and which, as Merleau-Ponty suggests is the 'ultimate truth' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 155) of subjectivity. The subject as sovereign 'I' is marked by a divergence (*ecart*), a dehiscence: '[T]he chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception [...], is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity [...] – *Activity = passivity*' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 264-265).

What is suggestive of Merleau-Ponty's thesis of flesh qua reversibility is an understanding that this reversibility introduces a notion of the sovereign 'I' as non-coincidence in which the interpretive drive of perceptual faith, the desire to know and to be absolutely is undermined by a chiasmic intertwinement in which my subjectivity can never be a pure self-presence. The presencing of the sovereign 'I' is impossible for Merleau-Ponty as the 'I' it can never full be present to itself. But neither does

reversibility indicate that the subject is fully dispersed or annihilated. Rather, the 'I' is dislocated, becoming strange in a series of disseminations thus also undermining its perceptual faith standing at the threshold when it encountering the abyss of the *there is* (*il y a*): '[T]he perceptual faith is a prepossession of Being, it is what gives our questions their relevance and their anchorage. It is the confidence that there is an answer *there* at the same time that it prompts the question "What is there?" and even "What is the *there is*?"' (Burke, 1990: 83). According to Merleau-Ponty (1968), this encounter with the abyss, the *il y a*, is always already there in *ecart*, introducing a fissure in epistemic self-coincidence and ultimate knowability: '[W]e know neither what exactly is this order and this concordance of the world to which we entrust ourselves, nor therefore what the enterprise will result in, nor even if it is really possible' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 39). Like the ontological question of 'What am I?', Merleau-Ponty's thesis of the invisible and that of reversibility introduces the question 'about the meaning of Being, about *what it is* for the world to exist [and which] comes down to the question "What do I know?"' (Burke, 1990: 87).

What Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and The Invisible* allows me to think through here is this: that this question of knowability in an encounter with the invisible, the Beyond as *il y a*, is a question of questioning perceptual faith. "What do I know?" is not a matter of mere cognition but which is aimed 'at itself as a question'. It does become radical as 'it is about knowing, about questioning, and about answering. Yet it is also a kind of knowing. It knows itself as a question at the same time that it questions the meaning of knowing' (Burke, 1990: 87-88). In short, what is at stake are the ways in which Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh and the gaze qua the invisible, by undermining perceptual faith, open up a radical relation even as it puts into question the 'relation' with the radically non-relational. In this section, I started with an exploration of the Lacanian gaze made possible by my earlier exploration of Homi Bhabha's account of the colonial gaze. But in doing so, I counterposed and related the Lacanian gaze to Merleau-Ponty's conception of the gaze as he relates it in *The Visible and The Invisible.* For Lacan, the gaze qua *objet petit a* is often referred to as the object-cause of desire, as that which sets desire in motion but which nevertheless is unobtainable. It can only ever be encircled. But the Lacanian gaze, as a practice of vision, demonstrates that the seeming plenitude of the subject as sovereign 'I' is a decoy, a captivating lure, as it is underlined by a *mesconnaissance*

signifying, at the same time, the always already falleness and the *spaltung* of the subject. But also opened up by the Lacanian gaze qua object is the question of the relation to the alterity of the Other that cannot be transmuted into the totality of sameness. As Joan Copjec (1986) indicates, what is at stake in the Lacanian gaze *qua objet petit a* is that 'the relation of the subject to the Other is not solely governed by recognition of a total image with which one can identify oneself. Instead this relation remains one of alterity in which there is a measure of nonrecognition, nonencounter, and anxiety. The alterity is maintained by the fact that the Other, the discourse of the Other, is itself resistance [...] Resistant to what? To meaning' (Copjec, 1986: 64).

Conclusion

The practices of the visible, then, are co-related with the management and organisation of social spaces and the securing of subjectivities. But also underpinning the practices of the visible are calculative-representative practices aimed at securing and managing alterity and heterogeneity, including the transubstantiation of the Other and forms of Otherness into the economy of Sameness. In this chapter, I explored how Bhabha's account of the colonial gaze draws on Foucault and Lacan to suggest that it is co-related with colonial relations of power as it is enacted in the regime of the scopic drive (Bhabha, 1997: 76). Equally, the colonial gaze is suggestive of a politics of the visible by which colonial surveillance produces definable and calculable subject positions. As identity-securing practices, the visibility practices underpinning the colonial gaze are practices by which the colonised are made knowable and representable for colonial governmentality. Colonial power relations, for Bhabha, are exercised not only in terms of economic exploitation or territorial appropriation. They are also exercised in the sphere of vision that in turn produces regimes of representational practices. Indeed, as Stuart Hall has reminded us, 'every regime of representation is a regime of power' (Hall, 1990: 225-226). In Foucault's conceptualisation of vision, the gaze is equally bound up with relations of power that are also co-related to desire to dominate and master the unknowable: 'the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates' (Foucault, 1975: 39). Foucault enhances our understanding of how relations of power are enacted in the visual particularly how practices of vision, as they are

exercised within the surveillant gaze, are underpinned by visibility practices that are concerned with the effort to distribute, arrange, demarcate and secure knowable bodies in space. Lefebvre also indicates that it is through the 'logics of visualisation' that representations of space and spatial practices enable the management and organisation of social spaces. He suggests that spatial practices and representations of space are linked to codifications of knowledge which are also underpinned by power. For Lefebvre, that space is saturated by exercises of power is undoubted, but the control of space via spatial practices such as cartography and urban spatial practices also render space calculable and seemingly lucid and transparent. What is suggestive in Lefebvre's mode of thinking is that it is through practices of vision, in this instance, the practices of the visible in dominant forms of spatial practices and representations of space that make possible the inauguration and worlding of the subject as sovereign and self-grounding 'I'. For Lacan, however, the gaze locates the limit-condition particularly the limits of our epistemic self-coincidence. The Lacanian gaze allows us to understand that while the gaze makes possible the formation of a coherent sovereign 'I' whereby the subject becomes visible and present unto itself, however this construal of self-coinciding subjectivity is fundamentally based on a *mesconnaissance*. The gaze, according to Lacan, 'prefigures its alienating destination' through which the subject as sovereign 'I' is decentred. The Lacanian gaze, in short, puts into question the *sujet suppose savoir*. Indeed, the Lacanian gaze renders the ontological status of the subject uncertain, an impossibility. This radical ex-centricity of the subject is, for Lacanians, an acknowledgement of the ambiguity and indeterminacy of a socio-political conception of subjectivity, representing a movement away from an essentialist conception of subjectivity. But it is also through the gaze that the 'I' is captured, enveloped and opened up to an alterity, an Other that is invisible. It is through the gaze by which the subject as sovereign 'I' is split, open to divergence (*ecart*) and by which the perceptual and epistemic faith is undermined by the encounter with *il y a* that remains on the side of the invisible. For Merleau-Ponty, the gaze opens up the subject via a chiasmic reversibility whereby the subject becomes a question unto itself.

But equally, throughout this chapter, what also emerges is that space is not simply a passive backdrop or an empty container against which subjectivity and social relations take place. Space locates the interanimating relations between the body-

subject *in/as* space, the formations of subjectivity and the relations of power in the production of bodies and spaces. In short, the subject is understood as an embodied body-subject, corporeally and visually constituted. It is these practices of vision that locate and make simultaneously possible and impossible the subject's inauguration to presence, to worlding. As an expressive body-subject, the *point de capiton*, both producer and product, the body moreover reveals itself through perceptions, gestures and symbols. As a relational subject, the body-subject is one of affective capacity, that is to say, the body-subject is also the condition of possibility as it relates to, and makes possible, the processes of subjection and subject-formation. Unsurprisingly, the body-subject is a *site* for the plays of power and resistances – a site of power relations and knowledge practices within which the body is rendered visible, both intelligible and mappable. In other words, the body-subject is central to the way space is produced, represented, lived and contested. Space is, then, not simply a backdrop, a container without content. The production of spaces and spatiality are equally dominated by practices of vision, made possible by what Lefebvre has referred to as the 'logics of visualisation'. Indeed, this chapter proceeded from the initial curiosity as to how bodies and spaces were made accessible by the practices of vision. Recall the initial question of this chapter: what are the practices of vision? This chapter thus serves as the enabling point of departure for subsequent chapters where I attempt to broaden out this question to further explore the political disposition underpinning the practices of the visible and the invisible.

As was suggested, for Bhabha, the colonial gaze is one of the strategies that enact and locates colonial relations of power in which imperial surveillance and observation produce visible and representable subjects for colonial governmentality. As Bhabha indicates, identities and subjectivities are thus secured by, for example, colonial stereotypical discourses. As has often been emphasised in postcolonial studies, the colonial gaze, as a strategy of surveillance, is a regular feature in accounts of imperial exploration and travel writing and becomes a method by which European explorers obtain visual and epistemic mastery of a scene from the position of a seemingly all-seeing panoramic observation, itself a representation of colonial power

and knowledge over colonised spaces.[25] But this colonial gaze, while it takes the motif of the 'master of all he surveys', is also enacted on the body which I discussed briefly by returning to the example of Fanon's encounter with the epistemic violence inherent to the colonial gaze. Indeed, as Spurr indicates, colonial surveillance partakes in a Foucauldian exercise of power relations in which the exercise of this gaze is enacted in part on the bodily: '[T]he eye treats the body as a landscape: it proceeds systematically from part to part, quantifying and spatializing, noting colour and texture, and finally passing an aesthetic judgment which stressed the body's role as object to be viewed' (Spurr, 1993: 23).

However, while these practices of vision indicate an enforcement of visibility by which alterity and heterogeneity are both secured and managed, I have to ask: what are the politics lurking in these practices of the vision? As was indicated, Bhabha suggests that vision is complicit with the metaphysic of Western Man (Bhabha, 1997: 42). Also, earlier I suggested that Lefebvre's account of representations of space make possible the inauguration of and worlding of the subject as self-coinciding sovereign 'I'. Crucially, Lefebvre emphasized that 'where there is space, there is being' (Lefebvre, 2000:22) which is suggestive of a metaphysic of presence. As Lefebvre suggests, the spatial and bodily inauguration of the 'I' as presence and sovereign is made possible by visuality. Spivak suggests, albeit differently, that worlding of colonial Man is made possible by colonial representational politics that are 'engaged in the consolidation of the self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground' (Spivak, 1985: 133). The next question I want to explore is: what makes possible the worlding of colonial Man as sovereign and subject? What are the politics of the visible lurking in colonial spatial thought that enable this worlding? I pursue this question in Chapter 2. As indicated earlier, Bhabha suggests that vision, as it is enacted in the colonial gaze, is itself complicit with a metaphysic of Western Man and emerges from acts of epistemic violence that displace the colonial relation. What is suggestive by Bhabha's elliptical construal of vision and its complicitous relation to the metaphysic of Western Man is that of an incarnational violence by which colonial Man can partake in the worlding of the identity-formula of the I Am Who I Am.

---

[25] See for example, Mary Louis Pratt (1986) and Spivak (1999).

As was indicated, Foucault suggests that the production of spaces and bodies are simultaneous with the productivity of power relations as they are enacted in the surveillant and classifying gaze – the eye of power construed as a 'dominating, overseeing gaze' (Foucault, 1980: 152). Foucault's history was highly sensitive to the place of the body and its inextricable boundedness to *space* and *place.* Moreover, it is through power that the body is marked and what Foucault sought to demonstrate was this tracing of the micro-practices of disciplinary, sovereign power and its relation to bio-power. For it is through power that the body is colonised and territorialised by discursive practices. In Foucault's account, power relations are active in the emplacement and the enframements of body-subjects in space by which bodies are produced, defined, categorised, differentiated and subjected. Foucault allows me to understand that these practices of vision are co-related with the practices of the visible by which bodies are rendered knowable and calculable through processes of differentiation that are moreover productive of a violence of abstraction, guaranteeing, then, hierarchies of differences and the submission and subjection of bodies. But these practices of the visible by which subjects are rendered knowable are also practices of the limits, enactments of closures that seek to define the limit-condition. And the imposition of closures and limit-conditions are also related to visibility politics.

Thus, it is from both Bhabha and Foucault that I *begin to arrive* at some understanding of the calculative-representative politics underpinning the practices the visible, practices that are compelled by the desire to secure the alterity of the Other and forms of Otherness. In Chapter 3, I continue to ask what are the politics lurking within the visibility practices of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism. After all, I ask: surely visibility politics can not be *confined solely* to colonial spatial thought? And indeed, in postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism, a legacy of colonial divide-and-rule policies, I glimpse a form of visibility politics in which the organisation of multicultural social space is underpinned by the accompanying enframement and securing of the lucid and homogeneous 'We' of the community. As I will suggest, lurking within the visibility politics of Singaporean multiculturalism is the dependence on the myth of a lucid, rational, self-coinciding community itself underscored by containment and management of alterity. Indeed, Bhabha has

suggested that multiculturalism as it is often construed is 'an attempt to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural difference, administering a consensus based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity' (Bhabha, 1990a: 208-209).

But I also ask: if multiculturalism enacts a visibility politics by which the 'We' of the community are enframed and guaranteed as knowable and securable, how then do we think the otherwise of the community of the 'We'? I ask this because Foucault suggests that where there are relations of power, there are apt to be practices of resistances. Also, Foucault has indicated that the condition of possibility of subjectivity as imposed limitation is also the condition of possibility for the exercise of freedom and which directs the subject's agonal struggle for the search for alternatives and pluralized possibilities of being. In other words, what is made available by Foucault is the idea that heterotopias locate the critical ontological struggle for the otherwise associated with the agonal struggles that attempt to re-conceive or re-think the conditions of our existence. These embodied spaces are the spaces where 'things' are left riskily underdefined, the spaces too that localize the subject's refusal to be reduced to or trapped within the constraints and prohibitions of dominant plays of power. I also ask this question, as Bhabha has indicated that there are spaces that locate an incommensurability-vision, which is suggestive of practices of resistances that displace those imposed closures and which are also enactments of the undecidable. For me, one of the sites that localise the practice of resistance to the visibility politics of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism are postcolonial Singaporean performances. In Chapter 3, I suggest that one of these representational spaces that localise an incommensurability-vision is TheatreWorks' performance of *Desdemona*.

In exploring *Desdemona*, I ask: what are the politics and ethic played out in the refusal of visibility politics? Firstly, I suggest that what is exemplified by *Desdemona*'s representational space is a resistance to the visibility politics of Singaporean multiculturalism. Secondly, I suggest that what is posed is an incommensurability-vision of poiesis. Instead of conforming to the notion of the community of the 'We', what is played out, in contrast, is the questioning of the 'We' of the multicultural community. *Desdemona* puts into question the multicultural

community of the 'We' that is offered by the Singaporean state's practices of securing the 'We' of the community. Instead, what is played out in *Desdemona* is the in-operative community, which is compelled by a radical relation to the community-to-come. But what is also made available to me by my exploration of *Desdemona* is a broadening out of the question of the politics of the invisible. *Desdemona*'s representational space – the space that locates the nodal point of the affective subject's struggle for the otherwise – is the springboard that allows a consideration of poetics which I suggest is compelled by a desire to think the otherwise, to poeticise the Other differently by offering a re-figuration of the relation towards radical alterity. Such a poetics, I suggest, is conditioned by a desire for a radical relation with the radically non-relational, itself compelled by an apophatic desire for the Beyond.

But how do we think or relate to the 'Beyond'? How do we think the 'relation' to the radical alterity of the Beyond? Surely, the 'relation' to the radical alterity of the invisible, the Other as Beyond, is an 'impossible' one? And because it is impossible surely the 'relation' that is opened up calls for a radical relation itself compelled by a necessity for an 'invention of the Other'? While I suggest in Chapter 3 that, as a practice of the invisible, poetics is compelled by an apophatic desire for the Beyond, I also suggest that it is posed as a thinking at the limit. Consequently, in Chapter 4, I ask how do we read and write in blindness? Is not a writing in blindness a form of thinking at the limit? These questions are made possible by the earlier exploration of Merleau-Ponty and Lacan, who both serve as an enabling a point of departure. Indeed, what was suggestive by their accounts of the gaze is that because the gaze is on the side of the invisible, the gaze emanating from an Otherness thus undermines perceptual faith and epistemic self-grounding subjectivity.

As indicated in the discussion of Merleau-Ponty, by *undermining* perceptual faith, flesh qua reversibility opens an incommensurability-vision of alterity. Radical alterity opened up by flesh is not immediately graspable, belonging on the side of the invisible, the beyond that poses the radically non-relational of alterity. Flesh, thus construed, is the chiasm of the visible with that of the invisible. How then do we approach an understanding of the invisible? How *then* do we open up to radical alterity posed by the Other's otherness? Because of the parameters of the thesis, while I do not pursue a reading of Merleau-Ponty's account of flesh in subsequent

chapters, what flesh makes available to my thinking in this chapter is that of reversible subjectivity and the questions it raises regarding the 'relation' to Other(s). Flesh qua reversibility locates the decentring of the egological 'I' whereby the sovereign 'I' becomes a question unto itself. Flesh qua the invisible introduces an element of Otherness within the 'I' and the trace of radical strangeness of/within/between human subject(s). It is also flesh that introduces the elements of sociality and obligation into the spaces of representation inhabited by the affective human subject. Levinas, for example, takes issue with the notion of a common symmetry implied in the handshake, and the implication of a mutuality and commonality between the Self and Other(s). The handshake, the chiasmus of one hand touching another, belongs to sociality (to the spaces of representation) which is a radical separation expressed in the hand one shakes that is not one's own: 'going from myself to the other [...] one may in particular wonder whether such a "relation" (the ethical relation) does not impose itself through a *radical separation* between the two hands, which in point of fact do not belong to the same body, nor to a hypothetical or only metaphorical intercorporeity' (Levinas, 1994: 101-102). Levinas calls this relation between humans, the relation of one subject to one another as 'non-in-difference', the strangeness of alterity encountered between human subjects. But this strangeness, of alterity encountered, also introduces an otherwise of being, an otherwise of the ontological totalitarian thinking lurking in the sovereign mode of being, the egological 'I': 'in the strangeness of humans vis-à-vis one another, but of humans capable of sociality in which the bond is no longer the integration of parts in a whole. Perhaps the spiritual bond lies in the non-in-difference of persons toward one another that is called love, but that does not absorb the difference of strangeness' (Levinas, 1994: 103). What is introduced in this mode of thinking chiasmic entwinement is the ethical asymmetry that arises between the Self and Other, including the summons of the sociality and obligations of embodied representational spaces. My understanding of Lefebvre's representational spaces in this chapter, then, is tempered and enhanced by the introduction of this understanding, namely, the ethical asymmetry that arises out of the chiasmus between Self and Otherness. These representational spaces, because they are nodal point of critical ontology, the counterpart of which is the encounter with forms of Otherness, are the opening of the 'spaces of obligation opened up by factical life, by the plurality of living bodies [...] and above all, in these times, in the times of

holocausts and of killing fields, by bodies in pain' (Caputo, 1988: 167). Flesh qua reversibility introduces a vulnerability to sovereignty politics and to the identity-formation of the egological 'I' and for Caputo, this is 'why Derrida has consistently pursued reversibility effects, identities unable to maintain their identity, which never attain an identity to maintain. Derrida is interested in hand and glove, foot and shoe, head and hat [...] in the instability and contingency of every identification' (Caputo, 1993: 200).

What is encountered in this chapter's exploration of the practices of vision is a strangeness that emanates from a haunting of the perceptual faith intrinsic in the visible by the radical alterity of Otherness, the invisible. But what is also encountered is the otherwise of being in which 'each is called to give the other its due in the Otherness they share, to which I have been referring as the excess of justice, and that the advent of stranger draws our attention' (Dillon, 1999: 132). And because the radical alterity posed by the arrival of Otherness undermines our perceptual faith and our epistemic self-certifying egological 'I', we are always writing in blindness. And because we write in blindness, how then do we respond to Otherness? Because the relation between Self and Other is always one of ethical asymmetry, how then do we relate to and respond to Otherness, a responsibility that Otherness insists on? After all, as Derrida suggests in *Memoirs of the Blind*, because the invisible haunts the visible as its very possibility, what is necessitated is a faith and passion for the impossible. And because what is also opened up by this notion of the invisible qua flesh are the spaces of obligation in factical life, which introduces the dimension of the political, how then do we think the relation to the Other(s) who are not the Same? For me, in this chapter, what is introduced by the invisible is that because the alterity of Otherness undermines perceptual faith, there is always a fissure in ultimate knowability, an anamorphic stain in the field of our present-vision and what is opened up instead is a writing in blindness. But this writing in blindness takes an address to the Other(s) and thus opens up the spaces of obligation between the 'I' and the 'You', of the 'We' in relation to Other(s). As I suggest in Chapter 4, because the Other is on the side of the invisible and brings us to the limits of our present-vision, and because the Other's otherness compels one to open up a radical relation with the radically non-relational, this necessitates a writing in blindness which is a form of

eschatological desire. For what is the invisible but that which calls for a radical relation to the challenge posed by radical alterity?

Chapter 2

The colonial 'I' and the Practice of the Visible

Introduction

In June 2002, while I was in Singapore conducting fieldwork, I decided to take a walk along the Singapore River – historically the site that plays a vital role in postcolonial Singapore's national imaginary. In its postcolonial narrative of the ontopologisation of Singapore coming into being, the colonial 'founding' of Singapore along the banks of the Singapore River plays a crucial part in the national imagination. Walking along the Singapore River, exploring the re-inscription and self-orientalising display of the colonial past 'palimpsestually encoded' onto postcolonial Singapore space for the consumption of the tourist gaze, I came across the Stamford Raffles statue – the so-called 'colonial father' and 'founder' of Singapore. This monument to the 'founding father' of Singapore was erected near the mouth of the Singapore River – the supposed site of his first landing. Beneath the statue of Raffles, I found this inscription on the pedestal in the four official languages of Singapore (English, Malay, Tamil and Mandarin):

> On this historic site
> Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles
> First landed in Singapore
> On 28th January 1819
> And with genius and perception
> Changed the Destiny of Singapore
> From an obscure Fishing Village
> To a Great Seaport and
> Modern Metropolis

As John Phillips (2000) indicates, this narration of colonial Singapore emerging and being produced from 'nothingness' is one which is popular with historians: "[I]ts historians tell of a colonial project in which Raffles representing the British East India

Company and employing forces from many nations – Indians, Chinese and Malays primarily – produces a city from scratch, his 'Manchester of the East'" (Phillips, 2000: 180). Moreover, this colonial narrative of Singapore's origins is beloved and oft repeated by the modern postcolonial 'father' of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew:

> What made Singapore different in the 1960s from most other countries of Southeast Asia was that she had no xenophobic hangover from colonialism. The statue of the founder of Singapore, Sir Stamford Raffles, still stands in the heart of the city to remind Singaporeans of his vision in 1819 of Singapore becoming, on the basis of free competition, the emporium of the East, on the route between India and China. There were then 120 people on the island. They lived by fishing. Within five years of its founding, there were 5,000 traders – British, Arabs, Chinese, Indians, and others drawn in by its principle of free and equal competition, regardless of race, language, or religion (quoted in Phillips, 2000: 180)

As Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's former Prime Minister and chief architect of postcolonial Singapore, states quite succinctly on another occasion, '[B]ut for him (Raffles), Singapore would be a mudflat' (Josey, 1968: 538).[1] Present day postcolonial Singapore is indeed an inheritance of British colonial policies and colonial spatial practices that were exported and translated onto the colonial scene of Singapore. Under Raffles, Singapore, which he referred to as his 'political child'[2], was remodeled along British spatial practices. Separate areas were designated as 'racial containers' for use by the various Asian ethnic communities, roads were built, magistrates appointed and regulations introduced to establish Singapore as a free port (Yeoh, 1996). Indeed, British colonial spatial practices fashioned colonial Singaporean urban space into a mirror-image of the British metropole (Yeoh, 1996). In short, the geographical entity that is represented as 'Singapore', often referred to as the 'Manchester of the East', is a direct result of the intervention of colonial Britain mediated through the figure of Raffles, then British Governor-General of India, who

---

[1] Indeed, for Lee Kuan Yew, the image of British power, and especially the image of the English man, became a model for him and was deeply constitutive in his self-presentation. As Ian Buruma explains it, for Lee Kuan Yew, his model was '[The] Englishman of the old school, who dressed up in the tropical heat and bravely bore the white man's burden' (Buruma, 1999: 34).

[2] Quoted in Bastin (1969: 14).

was given the task in 1819 of establishing a trading entrepot station in Singapore and who subsequently turned it into one of the Straits Settlements under imperial British rule, thus ending the colonial Dutch commercial monopoly.

Let us move now to a contemporary postcolonial intervention into that colonial memory of Raffles as 'founder' and 'father'. In July 2000, a series of site-specific exhibitions and investigations were initiated by AIM (Artists Investigating Monuments), a contemporary Singaporean collective of artists. One of the monuments that AIM decided to interrogate through a performance was the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles. As the artists of AIM indicate:

> [T]o erect a monument is to invest in a specific place meanings and memories [...] In AIM, we would like to explore the dual meanings of monuments. On the one hand, monuments represent official meanings, on the other, they can represent the individual's or the collective's struggle or resistance at one point in history. We would like to explore the past meanings of specific monuments in relation to their present accountability. Monuments are more than just objectified symbols in their respective societies, they are specific witnesses to the evolution of a prevalent culture (quoted in Weng Choy, 2000: 1).

Part of the performance, entitled 'A Face-to-Face with Raffles', involved Singaporean performance artist Lee Wen climbing onto a scaffolding set up in front of Raffles and coming toe-to-toe to Raffles. Members of the audience were also encouraged to climb up and as they talked, their comments were recorded. But I have to agree with Lee Weng Choy, cultural commentator and critic, when he asks, 'what intervention [...] could compare to the shock of reading the pedestal inscription?' (Lee Weng Choy, 2000: 2). As Lee Weng Choy, who was present at the site-specific performance, notes, while the performance piece, as a work of postcolonial intervention undoubtedly worked at a conceptual level, reading the text on the pedestal itself 'was [a] highly visceral' experience (Lee Weng Choy, 2000: 2).

Now, while, if Lee Kuan Yew is to be believed, Singapore might still be a 'mudflat' without the intervention of the colonial 'founder' and 'father', Sir Stamford Raffles, my aim in this chapter is not to question Lee Kuan Yew's thesis, nor to examine or excavate any pre-colonial, more originary moments preceding the founding of

Singapore in order to access some anterior truth about Singapore's pre-colonial history. Nor is it the aim of this chapter to conduct a discourse analysis of the 'founding', originary colonial narratives that initiated, and enabled, the 'representation' inherent in the toponymic power of nomination of colonial 'Singapore'. What interests me in this chapter is the politics of the visible. However, this chapter is not about to explore the politics of the visible within the British colonial racial practices in Singapore either. Nor is it about to study how these practices of the visible are encoded within British colonial spatial practices.[3] The question organizing this chapter is: what is the political disposition lurking within the practices of the visible? For the purposes of the chapter and thesis as a whole, in order to avoid an essentialist reading of the political disposition lurking within the practices of the visible and invisible, I locate and contextualize this exploration in Singapore. Also, given that this chapter represents only one moment in my exploration in the politics of the visible, I am therefore not suggesting that this chapter represents the only possible reading of the politics of the visible. In this chapter, while I limit the exploration of the politics of the visible to the colonial scene of Singapore, in the next chapter, I explore another example of visibility politics, that of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism, itself a legacy of British colonial divide-and-rule policies. In this chapter, one of those moments that prompt me to consider the politics of the visible is the inscribed text on the Raffles monument which serves as a springboard to consider how this instance of colonial spatial thought is encoded within the politics of the visible itself associated with, to borrow a well-known phrase from Spivak, a colonial 'worlding'.

In Chapter 1, I suggested that, for Lefebvre, there is an immediacy of relations between the body and space, a relation of simultaneity, in that between the 'body's

---

[3] For this analysis, one could turn to, for example, Singaporean sociologist Brenda Yeoh's (1996) *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* where she draws on Foucault's conceptualization of power to explore how British colonial spatial practices were constitutively entwined with colonial power relations. For example, she argues that colonial spatial practices emerged out of the processes of disciplinary and dividing practices which were at the same time racially encoded processes of delimitation and demarcation. According to Yeoh, one of the key dividing practices of British colonial racial policies in Singapore were the production of what I have come to term 'racialised spaces' that emerged out of British colonial divide-and-rule policies witnessed for example in Raffles 1822 plan of locating different 'races', dialect groups and trades in different *kampungs* or ethnic quarters. Crucially, she also makes the connection between the colonial spatial practices of the *geo-graphing* of colonized spaces whereby the colonial space of the Other is demarcated, differentiated and thus rendered 'knowable' for colonial surveillance and governance.

deployment in space and its occupation of space, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space' (Lefebvre, 2000: 170). As suggested in Chapter 1, vision plays a crucial role in the worlding of the body-subject: "[W]hen 'Ego' arrives in an unknown land or city, he first experiences it through every part of the body [...] For it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced" (Lefebvre, 2000: 162). In the next section, I take this immediacy of relations to refer to the worlding of subject. As Lefebvre has remarked succinctly '[W]here there is space, there is being' (Lefebvre, 2000: 22) which is suggestive also of a metaphysic of presencing. But I ask myself, by installing colonial Man in the space of the Other, by cathecting the space of the Other, what is the nature of this immediacy of relations? What is the nature of this being and be-coming of colonial Man whose worlding is made possible by over-writing the space of the Other? One of the keys to this question lies, one wagers, in Spivak's suggestion that 'the condition of possibility of this worlding of a world generates the force to make the "native" see himself as "other" (Spivak, 1999: 212). In the next section, to aid exploring the nature of this 'being' and be-coming of colonial Man, I consider the immediacy of relations between the body and space in terms of the 'worlding' of the colonial Man. For the purposes of the chapter, I consider how this worlding is witnessed firstly, in the inscription beneath the Stamford Raffles' statue. Secondly, I move on to consider another example of this worlding, namely the Singaporean colonial photographs and travel narratives. In doing so, I consider how the force of this worlding is made possible by the repeated usage of the colonial stereotype. Throughout, I explore how these processes of worlding are underpinned by a politics of the visible. Such a politics could arguably be thought of, in Derridean terms, as an onto-theologic politics of lack.

Colonial Worlding

What interests me in this section is the colonial politics of the visible as it is witnessed in colonial spatial thought. I suggest that this spatial thought contributes to, and makes possible, a form of metaphysical sovereign subjectivity. I glimpse an example of this worlding in the inscription beneath the statue of Sir Stamford Raffles, which prompted an instance of 'visceral shock' for both Lee Weng Choy and me:

> [...] Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles

> [...] with genius and perception
> Changed the Destiny of Singapore
> From an obscure Fishing Village
> To a Great Seaport and
> Modern Metropolis

He stands there on his pedestal with his arms folded across his chest, the agent of the British East Indian Company, his eyes fixed on some distant horizon, purportedly a master of all he surveys. Beneath the monument lies that inscription, an example of the worlding of colonial space – a monumentalizing, if you will, of colonial ideology. This 'founding' presupposes, of course, and implies the substitution meaning, and consequently the marginalization of a prior pre-colonial local and native history in the course of the British East India Company's move, mediated through the figure of Stamford Raffles, to strategically secure the lucrative trade route by controlling the Straits of Malacca. Under colonial British rule, the island of Singapore became a lucrative entrepot trade route. Apart from a brief interregnum during World War II when the British withdrew, thus enabling the Japanese forces to occupy Singapore and Malaya, the British remained in the region until the 1965. Decolonization arrived in Singapore in 1959 when Singapore was granted internal self-government by the British colonial administration. However, politically, Singapore remained administratively part of the peninsula of Malaysia until its separation from Malaysia, finally achieving self-governance and independence from the Federation of Malaysia in 1965, when independence was thrust onto the population, under the government of the People's Action Party (PAP) which has ruled continuously from 1959.

When we ask how the inscription beneath the Stamford Raffles statue participates in and exemplifies the worlding of the colonial British Man, and how it participates in the politics of the visible, the importance of visuality, and of writing becomes important. As I suggest in the chapter, the inscription beneath the Raffles statue, like the colonial travel photograph and colonial travel writing, participates in the worlding of the colonial subject.

In the inscription beneath the Raffles statue, for example, the colony is represented and marked as devoid of any meaning. Indeed, the inscription of colonial space as

'meaningless' and unbounded space ('an obscure fishing village') is the condition of possibility in which meaning and colonial worlding, including the institution and inhabitation of colonial Man of the place of the Other, is made possible. But this production of meaning for the 'I', made possible by the constitution of the colony as Other, is also fundamentally intertwined with questions of power and control. As Foucault indicates, 'space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (Foucault, 1991: 252). Similarly, Lefebvre has asserted that 'space is never empty, it always embodies meaning' (Lefebvre, 2000: 154).[4]

Indeed, one of the representations of colonial space that enables the appropriation of that space, and which simultaneously makes possible the imposition of inscription and the worlding of colonial Man, is the necessity of representing the colony as empty, unbounded and virginal. Writing and seeing colonial space as empty and virginal not only defines that space but clears that space whereby the introduction of colonization is made possible. By representing colonial space as empty, an Other to Europe, non-European space is erased, emptied and rendered insignificant. Such an erasure renders it capable of being 'filled' with meaning, ordered, an empty stage on/in which significant events can occur. In short, in order that colonial boundary-drawing exercises and the representations of colonial space are made possible and plausible, it is necessary to see and mark that space of the Other as homogeneous or uninscribed. As Mary Louis Pratt (1986) observes, the ability of the European gaze to see a foreign space as empty, even where a native society is present, is one of the important factors affecting the establishment of a colonial territory as an object of knowledge. Seeing colonial space as empty not only renders it a screen and like the mirror that reflects what the Eye/I wants to see, this textual gesture is not only a misrecognition of that foreign space but it also 'verbally depopulates' the space of meaning and content. But in addition, by rendering non-European space as an empty space, the 'indigenous peoples are relocated in separate manners-and-customs

---

[4] Similarly, Heidegger also indicates that 'when we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet, space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there is men, and over and above them space, for when I say "a man", and in saying that word think of a being [...] who dwells' (Heidegger, 1975: 154). In other words, if to be is to build and to build is to dwell, then to dwell is to be there, to be present at hand and to be there (*etre-la*) and which speaks of an epistemic certainty and self-coinciding presence of the grammatical positioning of the 'I'.

chapters as if in textual homelands or reservations, where they are pulled out of time to be preserved, contained, studied, admired, detested, pitied and mourned. Meanwhile, the now 'empty' landscape is personified as the metaphorical "face of the country" – a more tractable face that returns the European's gaze, echoes his words and accepts his caresses' (Pratt, 1986: 146). Indeed, as Homi Bhabha indicates, 'at the centre of the originary myth of colonialist power [...] is the demand that the space it occupies is unbounded, its reality coincident with the emergence of an imperialist narrative and history, its discourse nondialogic, its enunciation unitary, unmarked by the trace of difference' (Bhabha, 1997: 176). What both Bhabha (1997) and Pratt (1986) draw attention to is the imperialist desire for non-European space to be construed as unbounded empty space. Enabling this representation of colonial space as constituting an empty space is the enframement of the Other non-European space as a receptacle upon which meaning can be instrumentally inscribed and re-inscribed, a space onto which a new narrative and meaning is installed. Rendering the colony a receptacle thus enables it to become an imprint bearer for colonial management and governmentality. But compelling this exercise of rendering the colony as Other and thus necessitating representation is a politics of mastery in which the unknowable can be managed, transformed and contained into the known. Underlying this is a politics where, as Pratt also indicates, 'regardless of an individual traveler's own attitudes and intentions, the Europeans in this domain of struggle were charged with installing the edifice of domination and legitimizing its own hierarchy' (Pratt, 1986: 146). But accompanying this rendition of colonial space as unbounded and empty is the possibility for the worlding of colonial Man as sovereign and subject, which is the installation of presence, linked to the installation of the edifice of domination. In other words, the subject's relation to space is replete with a politics of enunciation. For the purposes of the chapter, the worlding of the colonial subject as Sovereign is dependent on an identity-securing practice where the condition of possibility of this worlding is that of the rendition of colonial space as an empty receptacle. As Grosz (1995) indicated:

> The subject's relation to space and time is not passive: space is not simply an empty receptacle, independent of contents; rather the ways in which space is perceived and represented depends on the kinds of objects positioned "within" it, and more particularly, the kinds of relation the subject has to those objects. Space makes possible different kinds

> of relations but in turn is transformed according to the subject's affective and instrumental relations within it. (Grosz, 1995: 92)

Indeed, coming face to face with the inscription beneath the Raffles statue, and accompanying that 'visceral shock' experienced by the Singaporean postcolonial reader, is the topos of encounter with the placing and institution of the proper name of colonial Man. Supposed by, and making possible, this placing is the imperialist enframement of the colonial Other as meaningless, a receptacle onto which new meaning can be imposed and inscribed, which is undeniably a performative and interpretive violence of signification (Derrida, 1992a). If space embodies meaning and if space receives meaning by that which stands there, then 'that which is occupied by what stands there [then] the place belongs to the thing itself' (Heidegger, 1961: 66), then perhaps what the Singaporean collective of artists, AIM, are contesting in their site-specific performance is that violence of signification and the willed auto-biographing of colonial Man witnessed in the act of be-coming-in-place, an imperialist presencing of colonial Man made possible by the occupation of the place of the Other just as the Other is inscribed as meaningless and rendered as the constitutive outside. As Spivak indicates, the condition of possibility of the 'worlding of a world' is the inscription of the colonial settlement as 'uninscribed earth', and which 'generates the force to make the "native" see himself as "other"' (Spivak, 1999: 212).

In short, by enframing colonial space as meaningless and an enabling receptacle, an imprint bearer that is capable of receiving a name and a representation, what is rendered possible is the onto-spatial constitution of colonial Man's self-actualization, an ethic of incarnation which is correlated with the power to mark, inscribe and be-come-in-place via the evacuation of the place of the Other. Such is the epistemic violence inherent in this worlding that, while the imperialist project was undoubtedly about a territorial and economic expansion, it was also inevitably a subject-constituting project whereby the colonized is constituted as a 'self-consolidating other' (Spivak, 1985: 128).

In short, this worlding and self-actualization of colonial Man refers the installation of the Sovereign Self of Europe. Indeed, as Spivak indicates, by constituting and

consolidating itself as 'sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and subject', colonial European man 'consolidated itself as sovereign subject by defining its colonies as "Others", even as it constituted them, for the purposes of administration and the expansion of markets, into programmed near-images of that sovereign self' (Spivak, 1985: 128). In this sense, the worlding of colonial Man refers to, and usefully describes, how colonial Man ontopologised and consolidated himself as Sovereign and Subject, as a self-coinciding presence just as the colony is constituted as a supplementary *tabula rasa*, an "Other" to colonial Man. In short, this worlding, the self-constitution of the 'I' as Sovereign and Subject is a subject constitution associated with an epistemic violation of the Other.[5] As Spivak indicates, by 'worlding their world', the colonised, as Self-constituting Other, is obliged to inscribe the alien as Master and Sovereign just as he is obliged to be cathected in the place of the Other: 'the figure of the European [...] is being reinscribed from stranger to Master, to the sovereign as Subject with a capital S, even as the native shrinks into the consolidating subjected subject in the lower case' (Spivak, 1985: 133).

Space is never empty. It always embodies meaning. As indicated in Chapter I, there is an immediacy and simultaneity in relations between the body-subject and its occupation of that space. In inhabiting that space, 'each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space' (Lefebvre, 2000: 170). It is the materiality and affectivity of the body that is the threshold to the visible world. As indicated in Chapter 1, it is through my body that I inhabit that space, it is through my body that I be-in-place and it is through the body that the 'I' as subject has access to spatiality and subjectivity. In colonial power relations, and in the inscription beneath the Raffles statue, we glimpse the imperial thought undergirding this be-coming in space of the European Self as Sovereign and Subject: 'a being who [...] has dreamt of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the

---

[5] See for example, Spivak (1985) 'The Rani of Sirmur' in *Europe and Its Others*' where she 'postcolonially' re-works and re-reads the Heideggerian concept-metaphor of 'worlding', an enabling concept-metaphor used by Spivak to allude to Heidegger's '*On the Origin of the Work of Art*' (1975a). Indeed, we see how worlding is an enabling concept-metaphor that describes the practices and ways in which an/Other colonised space is brought into the 'world', the ways in which imperial discourses inscribe itself onto the Other of colonised spaces and bodies, where the colony is made to exist as a part of the world that is essentially constituted by colonial discourses: 'If [...] we concentrated on documenting and theorizing the itinerary of the consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and subject, then we would produce an alternative historical narrative of the 'worlding' of what is today called 'the Third World' (Spivak, 1985: 128).

end of the game' (Derrida, 1978a: 265). But, underlying and presupposed by colonial spatial the representation of the colonial settlement as meaningless is the reduction of the Other's otherness, worthy only as a receptacle to bear the meaningful imprint of colonial Man. Enframed and inscribed as an imprint bearer, the Other space is constituted in the feminized, procreative role and its function is to receive, to take in and to make possible the possibilities of be-coming visible, present and knowable of that which stands there – the colonial Subject as Sovereign. Rendered receptacle/mother in the genesis of this be-coming of the sovereign colonial Subject, this Other space is enframed as the supplementary vessel for the willed auto-production of the colonial Subject as Sovereign. The Other is domesticated and tamed. As a Self-consolidating Other, the supplementary receptacle of colonial space makes possible the dwelling and worlding of the colonial Subject. Such an inhabited space is 'transformed according to the subject's affective and instrumental relations within it' (Grosz, 1995: 92). As Mark Wigley indicates, '[T]he spatial metaphor that must be "inhabited" is actually the metaphor of inhabitation itself [and] The edifice of metaphysics is necessarily a house' (Wigley, 1993: 106). Indeed, for Derrida, the spatial metaphor of the house, of the inhabitation of a space is a violent way of being – a metaphysic of presence. As Derrida indicates, the house is

> the very principle of violence. To dominate is always to house, to place in the *domus*. Domination is domestication. [...] Yet the house does not simply precede what it domesticates. The house is itself an effect of suppression. The classical figure of the feminine is that which lacks its own secure boundaries, producing insecurities by disrupting boundaries, and which therefore must be housed by masculine force that is no more than the ability to maintain rigid limits, or, more precisely, the effects of such limits, the representation of a space, a representation that is not only violently enforced by a range of disciplinary structures (legal, philosophical, economic, aesthetic, technical, social, and so on), but is itself a form of violence. Masculinity is not only erection but also enclosure, the logic of the house is as phallocentric as that of the tower (quoted in Wigley, 1993: 137-8).

Underlying this mode of colonial spatial thought is a form of the politics of the visible which is the consolidation of the Western Self as Sovereign and Subject. This

founding of colonial Man as Sovereign and Subject is premised on the constitution of the colonised as inferior term, the Other – the supplementary absence to the presence of the colonial 'I' as sovereign Subject.[6] The visibility politics referred to here, together with its association to colonial worlding, is the metaphysics of colonial Man's presencing as transcendental subject (being-as-self-presence). Let me explain. Underpinning this mode of colonial spatial thought is a logocentric phallocentrism that is enabled by the Self-consolidating Other, rendered as receptacle, a supplementary *domus* for the presencing of the egological 'I' of colonial Man. Related to these practices of enframing the Other are logocentric identity-securing projects in which the worlding of the colonial 'I' as sovereign is secured. This colonial worlding, made possible by the inscription of the Other space as meaningless and hence a supplementary receptacle, is accompanied by the installation of a self-coinciding presence of colonial Man as Sovereign. This tracking of the production of the Western Subject as sovereign is crucial because

> sovereignty is integral to a political thought that is indebted to the philosophical tradition of the West, and the philosophical tradition of the West is a metaphysics of presence. Sovereignty is the apogee of secure self-presence to which this tradition aspired as the secure foundation of its understanding of truth (Dillon, 1999: 117).

And this installation of sovereignty takes the form of a metaphysics of presence. Such a metaphysics of presencing refers to the installation of the onto-theological subject, a Self that secures itself as knowing, self-determining Subject insofar as its consolidation is dependent on the installation, and mastery, of the Other as calculable, thought object, namely, the knowable object.[7]

If we have learnt our lesson from Derrida, underlying this worlding and presencing of the colonial 'I' as Subject is a conceptualization of self-present sovereignty

---

[6] As Derrida explains it, "for presence to function as it is said to, it must have the qualities that supposedly belong to its opposite, absence. Thus, instead of defining absence in terms of presence, as its negative, we can treat 'presence' as the effect of a generalized absence' (Culler, 1998: 95).

[7] As Simon Critchley (1999) usefully explains it, for Derrida, the metaphysics of presence can also be called 'ontotheology' (Critchley, 1999: 20-24). And underpinning this metaphysics of presence is that of logocentrism (Culler, 1998: 92-96) and the mark of ontotheological thinking is the inability to think the conditions of its own possibility, thinking itself complete and knowing in its knowledge. Yet, this knowing which it gives it ground and a centering force is ungrounded and suspended over an abyss because while this ontotheological desire is marked by the 'desire to know – [but also] because the truth of its knowledge is only partial; but even more, such partial truth is made untrue by that which it conceals' (Robbins, 2002: 144).

associated with a logocentric ethnocentrism through which the West in part defines itself, which Derrida suggests is 'nothing but the most original and profound ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world' (Derrida, 1997a: 3). For Derrida, encoded within this ethnocentrism lies a kind of a double logic which conflates myth with a universal truth, which is the myth of a universal reason. As Derrida indicates

> Metaphysics – the white mythology which resembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that [which] he must still wish to call Reason. Which does not go uncontested (Derrida, 1986b: 213).

Derrida moreover indicates that the ethnocentrism of the white mythology underlying the metaphysics of presence, that of onto-theology, involves a catachresis (1995b: 172) and is associated with a violence of signification. As indicated in this section, this violence of signification takes the form of an epistemic violence in which colonial space is constituted as meaningless, unbounded space, an enabling supplementary receptacle in which colonial Man as Sovereign and Subject receives his meaning. Such a catachresis, as Derrida indicates is the 'violent production of meaning, an abuse which refers to no anterior or proper norm' (Derrida, 1995b: 172). On the one hand, while the visibility politics of the white mythology of Western metaphysical thought involves 'a palimpsest of metaphors (*eidos, telos, ousia*) and myths (of return, homecoming, transcendence towards the light, etc.)' (Derrida, 1995b: 172), what is additionally encoded into Western metaphysical thought is the nature of Being itself, which is inherently eschatological (Critchley, 1992: 83). Encoded within this mode of thought is the production of an onto-theological subject, a self-coinciding presence complicitous with a teleological thinking, and is inclusive of a mode of thinking compelled by a politics of the limit, the *eschaton*, associated with the setting forth of the meaning and essence of things such as 'God', 'Man' and *telos*. As Culler (1998) explains it, for Derrida, the metaphysics of presence is 'related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre [which] have always designated the constant of a presence' (Culler, 1998: 92). Equally, underscoring this grounding force and centering of presence is that of logocentrism (Culler, 1998). This entwinement between eschatological thinking and logocentric thinking refer to a form of the politics of the visible as terminality and calculability, a politics that takes the

form of eschatological thinking, a thinking that thinks itself complete by securing an Otherness to the horizon of the visible Same, which is the condition of possibility for securing this mode of eschatological thinking.

Mediated through the installation of the paternal figure of Raffles as 'founding father' and governor of Singapore, colonial Man (witnessed in that inscription on that pedestal of Raffles) 'changes the Destiny of Singapore'. As a practice of colonial visibility politics, what is enabled by the violent signification inherent in colonial spatial thought is the worlding and representation of 'Singapore' as colonial object of knowledge, consisting of a smoothened, homogenized eschatological teleology, namely the installation of the colonial present as an equivalent unit in a homogenous time line between the past and the future. 'Singapore' is thus worlded and 'represented' by her imperial masters who assume the stable centre and regulate meaning, and whose stability precedes all textual determinations and representations. This installation of presence is also made possible by the representation of colonial space as *terra nullis*, the condition of possibility for the installation of the colonial spatio-temporal system, thus making possible the colonial management of colonized space. In short, what is aspired to by colonial spatial thought, encoded as it is with metaphysical sovereign thought, is the actualizing into being a concrete social possibility, that of colonial governmentality – the installation of a sovereign and dominant edifice whereby an imperialist narrative is installed and set to work. However, this kind of thinking encloses the Other into a closed horizon of the Same by presuming to know from the start both its beginning and its end – a politics of the visible as terminality and calculability. Encoded within this worlding of the colonial 'I' is the perpetuation of a conception of eschatological thought, a notion of the self-coinciding present that is inextricably linked teleologically to a future, a destiny, that stands gleaming like a mirage of *parousia* where the colonial 'I' as Sovereign and as Subject can claim and partake in the identity-formula of the tetragrammaton of 'I Am Who I Am'.

To sum up this section, the visceral shock encountered in the inscription served as one moment to meditate on the force of signification underlying the worlding of colonial Man as Sovereign and Subject. By inscribing the colony as a meaningless space upon which meaning can be inscribed, the colonial 'I' is 'worlded' as Subject

and Sovereign, an ontopologisation made possible by a cathexis of the place of the colonial Other, the supplementary vessel. It is an occupation by which the colonized, as Self-consolidating Other and object, is evacuated and diminished – the colonized are narrativized out of their space. Included in this subject-constitution of the colonized as Other and object is the disavowal and discrimination of Otherness. Moreover, this epistemic violence is implicit in the European metropolitan representation of the colonial settlement as a 'pure' and 'meaningless' space, a representation that legitimizes the translation and re-inscription of Occidental space onto the colony. By constituting the colony as an imprint bearer and receptacle, an inscription that enables the colony to enact a mirror-function of familiarity for colonial Man, the egological 'I' as Sovereign and Subject, in a denial of the alterity of the Other, assumes the position as an 'Author-Creator', the transcendental source of meaning. But, as Spivak indicates, the worlding of the European Self and Sovereign and Subject relies on the 'necessary and yet contradictory assumption of an uninscribed earth' (Spivak, 1985: 133) gesturing to the ways in which colonial discourses inscribe the constituted Self-consolidating Other of colonised space. In a very obvious way, these processes of worlding are enabled in part by the spatial practices of mapping and cartography – by mapping, by delineating the colony internally and externally, and thereby enabling the worlding of the colony onto the map of the world. The power relations implicit in this worlding are underpinned by the power of nomination whereby the colony is worlded in an imperial identity-securing practice. Such a worlding enables the colony to be emplaced and enframed calculatively as a visible and knowable object of the colonial gaze. For example, in her postcolonial re-reading of Heidegger, Spivak indicates the violence of signification inherent to these calculative-representative processes of the imperial worlding of non-European spaces:

> What emerges out of the violence of the rift [*Riss* in Heidegger has the violent implications of a fracture – "fighting the battle," "the intimacy of opponents" – rather than the relative "cool" connotation of a gap] is the multifarious thingliness [*Dinglichkeit*] of a represented world on a map, not merely "the materiality of oil paint affirmed and foregrounded in its own right" as in some masterwork of European art. (Spivak, 1985: 133)

Additionally, Spivak draws our attention to how these processes of worlding occur in far subtler ways. Spivak gives the example of the solitary British soldier simply walking across the countryside in nineteenth-century India:

> He is actually engaged in consolidating the self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground [that is, he is obliging the native to experience his home ground as imperial space]. He is worlding their own world, which is far from uninscribed earth. (Spivak, 1985: 133)

In these subtle processes of imperial worlding of the European 'I', she indicates the diverse ways in which imperial Man overwrites the colonised space by simply being there. Such is the force of this presencing of colonial Man's sovereign be-coming in place that is made possible by firstly, a violence of signification and secondly, the force of cathexis, of the force of retention and the occupation by the self-consolidating colonial 'Eye/I' of desire of the place of the Other.

In other words, what Spivak emphasizes is that the processes of imperial worlding are necessarily heterogeneous and occur over many sites. This cartographic transformation of the colony and the worlding of the imperial Self, as Spivak indicates, were not only achieved by imperial policy makers, they were achieved in part by solitary soldiers and travelers. However, for the purposes of the chapter, I suggest that these processes of worlding were achieved in part by the visual practices of colonial Man. The next section continues to consider this worlding of the colonial Man as Sovereign and Subject and how it is made possible in the colonial stereotype. In doing so, I continue to explore the continuing and related concern of this chapter: how this worlding discloses a political disposition inherent to the practices of the visible.

The colonial Eye/I and the stereotype

In the preceding section, I discussed the worlding of colonial Man as Sovereign and Subject and how it was in part dependent on an epistemic violence associated with the inscription of the colonial settlement as a meaningless, empty space. Secondly, I considered how the actualization of the metaphysical sovereignty of the European Self was made possible by the constitution of the colony as a supplementary

receptacle. I discussed, albeit briefly, how this installation of sovereignty was dependent in part on a mode of colonial spatial thought that is encoded with an eschatological thinking. Such a mode of thought, that which is guided by a thinking of 'last things' (*eschaton*), is underscored by a desire for the ontologisation of presence (I Am Who I Am) associated with the drive to be, to know and to see absolutely. In this case, the installation of colonial Man as the transcendental signified and Master of all he surveys is dependent on the securing of the Other. Such a presence presumes to hold court over the visible field of vision, setting out the conditions of possibility in advance for the emergence of meaning and phenomenon, and refers to the practice of a politics of the visible, a politics construed as terminality and calculability. As suggested, this absolutist desire for presence, for centering and grounding of European self as Subject and Sovereign is made possible by the logocentric rendition of non-European space as the negative, inferior term, the supplementary receptacle on which the securing and the worlding of the 'I' is made possible. The security of the onto-theological circle and closure of this sovereign presence is thus preserved and ensured by a denial of alterity in a logocentric mastery and negation of difference, the condition of possibility by which the sovereignty and worlding of the author-creator is assured and made possible. As a practice of politics, this worlding of colonial Man as Sovereign and Subject, as self-certifying onto-theological presence, refers to a form of eschatology and the practice of finitude.

In Chapter 1 I indicated that underpinning visibility politics is the exercise of relations of power, which is associated with the representations of space and bodies. This is the exercise of panopticisim, which Foucault refers to as the 'Eye of Power' and, for him, this is linked to the 'problem of visibility [...] organized around a dominating, overseeing gaze' (Foucault, 1980: 152). The politics underlying this practice of power is a politics of the visible, which is co-related to the 'subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected' (Foucault, 1979: 184-5). Underlying the power-knowledge dyad of the Benthamite panoptic surveillance is a principle of visibility, which is permeated at the same time with subtle and omnipresent exercise of power: 'The examination transformed the economy of visibility into the exercise of power' (Foucault, 1979: 187). For Foucault, we are in a 'panoptic machine' (Foucault, 1979: 217) co-related to the production of

visibility. For Foucault, practices of vision are bound up with relations of power including disciplinary power, normalizing judgment and the medical examination. As a way to secure and impose knowability and calculability on the unknown, this demand of knowability from the Other and forms of Otherness is associated with the imposition of compulsory visibility and calculability on the Other, the object of the Eye of Power. In terms of resistances to these politics of the visible, in Chapter 3, I explore how TheatreWorks' production of *Desdemona* exemplifies those heterotopias that Foucault speaks of, and because this performance, like the other TheatreWorks performance, *Lear*, resists visibility politics, thus undermining perceptual faith, I suggest that the radical ambiguity of these performances exemplify a poetics of the (im)possible (Chapter 3) and an eschatological desire and openness to Otherness, an aspect of the politics of the invisible (Chapter 4).

While the imposition of visibility and knowability on the Other is fundamental in the exercise of colonial relations of power and knowledge practices, this demand for knowability and perceptual certitude of the Other's otherness is linked to the production of meaning and perceptual faith for knowing Eye of Power who desires to know absolutely. To understand this demand and regulation of intelligibility, I turn, for the purposes of this section, to the colonial photographs and travel narratives of Singapore. I suggest that these representations of colonial Singaporean space are sites where we witness the exercise of colonial worlding. I indicate that organizing these representations of colonial Singapore is the colonial stereotype, a practice of imposing cognitive certainty on uncertainties opened up by an encounter with ineffable Otherness. As a condition of possibility for the worlding and presencing of the knowing, sovereign Eye/I, the colonial stereotype, as a practice of securing and normalising identities, is itself dependent on colonial visuality and the practices of visibility.

In the case of representations of colonial Singapore, I do not want to suggest that colonial thought produces only one stereotypical narrative. While the epistemic violence underlying the representation of Singapore, and thereby legitimizing its 'founding' by Raffles, had portrayed Singaporean space as insignificant and meaningless and therefore worthy of imposing colonial meaning, travel narratives and photographs following the installation of the British colonial presence often

presented colonial Singaporean space in the typical stereotypes as 'jungle-clad', filled with 'Edenic tropical luxuriance'. However, apart from the stereotypical rendition of colonial Singapore as a lush, Edenic tropical island in colonial travel narratives, the full range of the Occidental vision and stereotyping of Singapore is exemplified in the plethora of visual material, particularly Singaporean colonial postcards and photographs. In addition to the colonial travel narratives of Singapore, the photographing of colonial Singapore deploy the standard colonial stereotyping of the tropics, ranging across a multiplicity of categories, from the colonial urban landscapes, to the luxuriance of the tropical jungle and wildness of wilderness spaces, from studio portraiture of the colonial settlers to the customary depiction of 'exotic racial types' and 'exotic customs and manners'. Typically, many of these images employed reductive Orientalist tropes to impart a sense of an exotic place and peoples trapped in distant times and moored to a past that was untouched by the colonial 'civilizing' process. Undeniably, these themes are often central to the Orientalist stereotypical discourses of the East.[8] These stereotypical representations are, in short, one of the sites where we witness an incessant demand of knowability and perceptual certitude of the Other's otherness. These colonial stereotypical discourses are associated, then, to a securing of unconditional certainty by which the ambiguity of undecidable Otherness can be known and mastered. In these representations, the otherness of non-European space and peoples were textualized and produced as an information-source for colonial knowledge, practices that are associated with colonial governmentality.

The colonial travel photographs of Singapore demonstrate that the travelers' field of vision exemplifies the diverse but well-trodden Orientalist themes. They serve not merely as a field of information gathering of the Other's otherness but also as a nodal point for a panoptic practice of visibility politics, the counterpart of the consolidation of the sovereignty of the knowing 'Eye/I' of colonial Man. Like a solar Eye, looking down from a vantage point, the colonial travel narrative and the colonial photograph participate in the imposition of compulsory visibility and intelligibility, transforming the alterity of foreign, non-European spaces and bodies into objects capable of been seen, observed, measured and thus included as objects of

---

[8] See for example Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).

information within the field of colonial vision/power. With regard to the colonial traveler's gaze, Mary Louis Pratt (1986), for example, has suggested that the nineteenth century colonial vision often assumes the form of a panoramic sweep, the (gendered) eye that commands and 'opens up' a foreign land.[9] John Urry (1990), for example, mentions that in the traveler's gaze, disparate sights and bodies are collected in the form of travel narratives, postcards, brochures and photographs. For Urry, who argues that without actually colonizing the colonial territory in the strictest sense, the gaze of the traveler establishes a spatial and epistemological order in a foreign space through the mediation of informed vision. Like the panoptic gaze that insists on visibility and knowledge from bodies and spaces, the photographic and traveler's gaze are on the side of vision, and therefore partake in quantification, classification and information retrieval by taking command of the constituted Other who is on the side of the visible. In *The Politics of Representation* (1988), Michael Shapiro draws our attention to the political rhetoric of photographic practices and their tendency to reproduce dominant forms of discourses particularly in their ability to circulate and further entrench existing systems of power and authority in terms of knowledge production and information retrieval. For example, Shapiro draws our attention to photography's epistemic authority particularly its association with the 'development of disciplinary/knowledge agencies whose activities support forms of social and political regulation' (Shapiro, 1988: 141). In terms of the visibility politics of the panoptic gaze of photographic practices, both Shapiro (1988) and Anne Maxwell (1999) foreground the political rhetoric of the photograph's political practices especially their participation in the processes of producing legitimate and illegitimate identities such as the production of visible taxonomies of differences, such as 'criminal types' (Shapiro, 1988) and 'exotic, native types' (Maxwell, 1999) that are other to the normative European ethnic, racial and gender standards. In addition, for the traveler in a strange land, taking a photographic record of spaces and peoples who are 'other' can be a way of containing and enframing the unknowable, thus

---

[9] For example, in *The Face of the Country*, Pratt (1986) indicates that this type of gendered visual practice in colonial travel writing partakes in an Eye/I that commands and demands to know – consisting 'chiefly in sweeping prospects that open before or, more often, beneath the traveler's eye. Such panoramic views are an important commonplace of European aesthetics, of course, and that undoubtedly accounts for much of their appeal here. In the context of exploration writing like Barrow's, however, such views acquire and serve to familiarize meanings they may not have on the domestic front. Barrow's own language suggests, for example, the fantasy of dominance that is commonly built into this stance. The eye "commands" what falls within the gaze; the mountains "show themselves" or "present themselves"; the country "opens up" before the European newcomer, as does the unclothed indigenous bodyscape' (Pratt, 1986: 143).

assuaging an anxiety when faced with differences. As Susan Sontag indicates, taking a photograph is reassuring, enabling people

> to take possession of space in which they are insecure [...] The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture (Sontag, 1979: 9-10).

In terms of the political rhetoric of photographic practices, the visibility politics of photographic practices partake in assisting the logocentric conceptualization of the European civilized Self who was to be distinguished from the Self-consolidating Other who took the form of the 'illegitimate' form of identity. For example, located within the visibility politics of the colonial photograph and the postcard are the productions of colonial stereotyping. Such colonial stereotypings have frequently played an educative role in the imperial knowledge production of the ineffability of the Otherness of colonial spaces, bodies and identities. As Maxwell (1999), writing on the colonial exhibitionary complex, explains

> Colonial photography too was in the business of confirming and reproducing the racial theories and stereotypes that assisted European expansion. While photography and exhibitions constituted separate sites of cultural production, they both catered to the tastes of adventure-seekers and tourists using a language that was predominantly visual (Maxwell, 1999: 9).

In short, such is the politics of the visible underlying the epistemic authority of the photograph that it becomes a representational container where we witness the processes of 'othering'. Secondly, like a symbolic structure, the photograph enframes culturally formed images of forms of Otherness as observed 'realities', thus rendering them as 'knowable objects' of the colonial gaze. Unsurprisingly, in the colonial photographs and postcards of Singapore what is pronounced is that these colonial images of Singaporean space and peoples are wedded firmly to the colonial stereotypes that are often deployed in the representations of the Tropical East.

While these colonial photographs and narratives in Singapore deploy the atypical image-laden stereotypes of the Orient as exotic, mysterious, wilderness spaces peopled with 'exotic racial types' and 'exotic manners and customs', what is

undoubted in these deployments of Orientalist stereotypes of the Tropics is the binarised installation of Self-Other distinctions, for example, the civilized metropolitan West versus the 'jungle-clad' and 'untamed' Edenic Tropics. For example, Stepan (2001) draws our attention to Alexander von Humboldt's creation of a Humboldtian Tropics. Stepan indicates that, chiefly as a result of his encyclopaedist knowledge production of the Tropics in terms of its flora, fauna and culture, Humboldt was one of the most influential and significant source of the nineteenth century's stereotypical vision of the Tropics. In Humboldt, we witness one of the sources of 'imperialist knowledge, whose very gaze – the knowing eye/I – appropriated tropical nature wholesale for European consumption and exploitation' (Stepan, 2001: 36). In Humboldt, we also witness how the creation of the Tropics as a Torrid Zone, an Other to Europe, pedals in logocentric stereotypical tropes which became particularly popular in nineteenth century Western Europe. In the process of colonial travel, these stereotypes of the Tropics were further developed and entrenched in popular representations (Stepan, 2001). Stepan (2001) notes several tropes that are pedaled in the Humboldtian view of the tropics. For example, some of these are the depictions of tropical spaces that serve as the topos of an encounter with the sublime, an Otherness capable of inspiring awe and estrangement because nature was at its most mysterious and strange and awe-inspiring. Another typical Humboldtian trope of tropical nature was the superfecundity of tropical vegetation, while another unsurprising stereotypical trope of the Tropics was its Edenic bountifulness.

To glimpse an example of this Humboldtian trope of the tropics as a space of superabundance and fecundity, we can turn to, for example, Thompson's *The Straits of Malacca*. John Thompson (1837-1921), a celebrated British colonial travel-photographer who pioneered the combination of photographs and narratives, reports his first encounter with colonial Singapore:

> Not many years ago it was a mere jungle-clad island, like hundreds of others in the Eastern seas, with few fisher huts dotted here and there along its coasts (J. Thompson, 1875: 53).

Similarly, in *Foot-Prints of Travel* (1903), Maturin Ballou also resorted to the familiar orientalising gesture in his stereotypical portrayal Singapore as an Edenic and exotic tropical island:

> Here, upon landing, we are surrounded by tropical luxuriance, the palm and cocoanut trees looming over our heads and shading whole groves of bananas. The most precious spices, the richest fruits, the gaudiest feathered birds are found in their native atmosphere [...] There is no winter or autumn here, no sere and yellow leaf period, but seemingly a perpetual spring, with a temperature almost unvarying; new leaves always swelling from the bud, flowers always in bloom (M.M. Ballou, 1903: 39-40)

The theme of the 'wilderness', the 'tropical jungle' and the 'Edenic tropical paradise', familiar tropes that crop up repeatedly in both colonial photography and travel narratives in Singapore, defines colonial space in fundamental opposition to the civilized European colonial metropole. The stereotypes accompanying the depiction of tropical nature had characteristic tropes and often told those at home in the metropole as much about themselves as it did about the otherness of the colonies. In these representations of colonial Singaporean space, the chief stereotypical tropes of the tropics are employed here, for example, its rendition of the tropics as a place of superabundance, fertility and extravagance ('surrounded by tropical luxuriance' [...] The most precious spices, the richest fruit, the gaudies feathered birds). Another feature of the stereotypical Orientalist tropes employed is the depiction of the colony as a space of Edenic superfecundity, of untamed tropical nature, which was in direct binarised contrast to the temperateness of the European climate and identity ('there is no winter or autumn here, no sere and yellow leaf period [...] perpetual spring [...] new leaves always swelling from the bud, flowers always in bloom'). Similarly to the travel narratives, the colonial photographs and postcards of Singapore evoke the familiar Orientalising gestures particularly the rendition of the wilderness spaces of colonial Singapore as the Edenic Tropics, both untamed and a place of plenitude. Added to this are other secondary visual qualifiers such as the tropical swamps and jungles which are depicted as un-constructed, essentialist virginal nature in contrast to the civilized European metropole.

Similarly, in Alfred Wallace's *The Malay Archipelago* (1869), we have a blend of travelogue and scientific document of the region. In his depiction of the tropics, we see Wallace, a tropical naturalist wandering through the tropical jungles of the Malay Archipelago, narrating his encounters with strange, savage beasts and native

peoples. Similarly to Thompson and Ballou, in his description of exotic species of plants and animals of tropical nature, Wallace employed the typical stereotypes of the fecundity of the tropical jungle. Unsurprisingly, Wallace, in a familiar Orientalising and stereotypical gesture, renders indigenous peoples of the Southeast Asian region as the 'the noble and graceful savage': '[W]hat are the finest Grecian statues to the living, moving, breathing men I saw daily around me? The unrestrained grace of the naked savage as he goes about his daily occupations, or lounges at his ease, must be seen to be believed' (Wallace, 1989: 467). In addition, many of the illustrations in his book employ the stereotypical tropes that render the tropics, especially natural history specimens, bizarre and strange. Crucially, Grove (1995) indicates that the European search for a plentiful tropical Eden, fuelled in part by the stories of bountiful nature, brought the West's colonial advance to distant lands particularly Southeast Asia, which was necessitated in part for the search for timber to build trade and battleships. Fort Canning in Singapore, also known as Government Hill and Forbidden Hill, while a locus as a political site in colonial Singapore (it was the residence of the chief British colonial officer in Singapore), was also the colony's first botanical garden, the site that witnessed an early form of tropical environmentalism. Here, colonial spatiality transforms the Hill into an Edenic garden for the cultivation of rare plants, the sought after literal transcription and mirror image of the colonial imagination of the Edenic Tropics.[10] But the gardens on Government Hill also represented the efforts of conservationists and botanists working in the region. These were men who, as part of the vast colonial project of scientific classification and specimen gathering, sent specimens home to Britain's Kew Gardens. Such is the colonization by epistemology that a foreign presence controls and tames a space by 'knowing' it not merely in terms of colonial visuality, such as those deployed in the stereotypical tropes employed in the colonial photographs and travel narratives, but also in terms of scientific knowledge production.

But suffice it to say, and to return to the production of taxonomies of visible differences of colonial spaces and indigenous peoples in the colonial photographs

---

[10] As C. M. Turnbull indicates, Raffles 'built himself a wooden bungalow on the Forbidden Hill, later renamed Government Hill, partly to escape from the oppressive heat of the plain below, partly in a death wish to be buried among the Malay rulers of old Singapura. In 1819 he had dispatched a European gardener from Bencoolen [in Indonesia] to plant clove and nutmeg trees at the foot of the hill [...] Raffles hoped his experimental garden would provide the foundation for Singapore's agricultural prosperity' (Turnbull, 1989: 21).

and postcards of Singapore, apart from the typical stereotypical deployment of the tropics as 'Edenic', what these depictions of colonial Singapore undeniably exemplify is the structure of the colonial stereotype. As a major discursive strategy of colonial discourse, the diverse stereotypical depictions of colonial tropical space and peoples testify to the desire of the knowing 'Eye/I' for fixity and intelligibility. As indicated, these Orientalising stereotypical gestures, in rendering the Tropics as an Edenic space of superfecundity, vegetative abundance and tropical excessiveness, also define colonial space, in a logocentric gesture, in fundamental opposition to the civilized metropole and centre. As a form logocentrism, these stereotypical gestures served to secure the identity of the European Self as temperate and civilized by processes of 'othering'. As Stepan (2001) observes, these stereotypical representations 'confirmed their readers' sense of European superiority even as they appeared to extol the merits of the foreign. Tropical nature was, in this sense, part of the formation of Europe's identity as a place of temperateness, control, hard work and thriftiness as opposed to the humidity, extravagance and superfluity of the Torrid Zone' (Stepan, 2001: 36).

Nonetheless, as Bhabha indicates, the familiarity and fixity of these stereotypical gestures is indicative of the other requirement of stereotypical discourses, namely the need for incessant practices of the power-knowledge dyad, associated with the desire of the knowing colonial Eye of power to see and to secure the ineffability of Otherness absolutely. As Bhabha suggests, the repetitiveness of the colonial stereotype offers and assures colonial Man, the knowing Eye of power, a seemingly secure point of identification, a point of seeming fixity that assures and supplements the self-certainty of the Self as sovereign and knowing 'I', just as it secures the alterity of Otherness into knowable, stereotypical positions.

But such is the intrinsic insecurable ambiguity of Otherness that the practices of the colonial stereotype, associated as they are with the desire to know and to fix epistemological intelligibility and certainty on forms of Otherness that the stereotype 'vacillates between what is always "in place", already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated' (Bhabha, 1997: 66). Such is the desire for fixity, for absolute certainty, that the colonial stereotype, as Bhabha indicates, oscillates and shifts across a wide range of (albeit familiar) stereotypical gestures. For example,

colonial representation of the Chinese population in nineteenth century Singapore certainly displayed a sense of discursive uncertainty and ambivalence. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Chinese settlement constituted mainly of Chinese men, over 72 per cent of the total population of Singapore, a result of the recruitment – and sometimes kidnap – of 'coolie' labourers of Chinese men from the Southern coastal villages in China. In Singapore, the massive intake of immigrant laborers took place around 1850s, with some 13,000 arriving in 1853/54 (Turnbull, 1977: 53-54). Between 1881 and 1931, 37,000 to 103,000 men each year sailed from Hong Kong to Singapore to work as 'coolie' laborers at the treaty port of Singapore (Warren, 1986: 16-17). Such was the discursive uncertainty of the Chinese, as Other to the European Self, that the colonial representations of the Chinese laborers in Singapore often veered between the stereotypical depiction of 'diligent, hardworking Chinese' to the stereotype of 'drug sodden Chinaman' or the 'yellow peril': 'the hollowed-eyed, emaciated Oriental stretched out on his pallet, pipe in hand [...] a stereotype of Asiatic decadence and indulgence [and] the icon of all that was beyond the pale of Christian morality and human decency' (Trocki, 1990: 1). George Windsor Earl, ship's captain, lawyer and colonial official, wrote in *The Eastern Seas*: '[O]f the native population of Singapore, the Chinese are the most numerous and the most important, indeed their industry and perseverance have mainly contributed to the present flourishing state of the settlement' (Earl, 1937: 362). Indeed, this stereotype of the hardworking Chinese: 'the mule among nations' (Alatas, 1977: 76) is accompanied by, and opposed to, the production of another stereotype, that of the 'lazy Malay' (Alatas, 1977: 72). Indeed, in *British Malaya*, Frank Swettenham repeats this stereotypical representation of the Malay, namely the supposed 'inherent laziness' of the Malays: '[T]he leading characteristic of the Malays of every class is a disinclination to work. Nature has done so much for him that he is never really old and never starves [...] The Malay has no stomach for hard continuous work (Swettenham, 1948: 136-140). As John Crawfurd, a colonial official also wrote: 'I entertain so high an opinion of the industry, skill and capacity of consumption of the Chinese, that I consider one Chinaman equal to the value to the state of two natives of the Coromandel Coast and to four Malays at least' (Crawfurd, 1820: 410). The representations of the Chinese and Malays peoples in colonial Singapore certainly exemplify the vacillation and register the shifts of stereotypical discourses across a range of, albeit familiar, stereotypical gestures. Condensed within these stereotypical

representations are the contradictory representation of the Chinese (hardworking and yet, drug-sodden opium wrecks) and Malays ('inherently lazy') into different essentialistic positions of 'fixity' and seeming knowability. As mentioned in Chapter 1, for Bhabha, while colonial stereotypical discourses represent processes of 'othering', these processes of 'othering' and 'fixing' knowability was also essential to homogenize a colonized community for the exercise of colonial governmentality. However, given the discursive uncertainty of Otherness, the structure of the colonial stereotype is such that it is also essentially unstable and requires an incessant repetition, it is anxious as it is insistent. As Bhabha explains it, the important feature to recognize in colonial discourses

> is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity, as a sign of cultural/ historical/ racial difference in the discourses of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation; it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition (Bhabha, 1997: 66).

This desire for fixity and the demand of knowability of the Other is often, as Bhabha asserts, undergirded with both an anxiety and the desire to secure a guaranteed cognitive certainty and mastery of Otherness. But as Bhabha indicates, such is the ambivalence and anxiety of the hold of colonial power and mastery over Otherness that it oscillates between the twin poles of desire and fear. This vacillation, as construed by Bhabha, is compelled by a need to ascribe and fix a 'familiarity' and 'knowability' onto the colonized who, for the purposes of colonial governmentality, is constituted as object and Other. It seems that for Bhabha, the colonial stereotype, as a mode of representing and containing Otherness, embodies a *doxa*, an image-repertoire of deadening repetitions that is the site of fantasy and anxiety – a contradictory structure articulated according to the contradictory logic that is similar, for Bhabha, to the structure of the fetish. Crucially, while entwined within the aleatory practices of the colonial stereotype is the onto-theologic desire and demand for certainty, this demand for a calculable knowability from the Other is underscored by the exercise of visibility politics. As Bhabha indicates, within the discourse of the colonial stereotype, colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed 'reality' who is at once constituted as 'Other', albeit an Otherness that is entirely intelligible, representable and visible. It seems that the goal and the desire of the colonial

stereotype – that which lends visibility, definiteness to the indefinite alterity of Otherness – is the desire to achieve a pure conceptual knowledge via a homogenization of the Other so as to reveal and make visible the form of the thing to be known. Implicit also within this desire to capture the Other within a 'truth-value' is the prescription of properties as the essence of the thing because that is how we think we know the thing should essentially be. In short, implicit in the colonial stereotype is a relationship with the Other and forms of Otherness that remains one of essentialism, the counterpart of which is the logocentric mastery of Otherness. In terms of its political rhetoric, the colonial stereotype, as a practice of representative-calculative thought, becomes a way of securing the insecurable alterity of Otherness. Difference in colonial stereotypical discourse is thus projected as a difference from a 'true' or fixed identity. This type of thinking, which is also political, exemplifies the metaphysical assumption of what Derrida terms originary being. In the relations between the Self and its Other, the colonial Self assumes the role of conceptual absolutism, the centre who assumes the control of the range of meanings by designating as different and impious all those that are unlike the Self who is presumed as absolute and thus unavailable for interrogation. According to the essentialist and absolutist logic of the colonial stereotype, all colonized others are assumed to be imperfect copies of the colonial Self – the 'I'. Yet, the Other, as figure of difference and constituted as supplementary vessel, is also the condition of possibility by which the Self is guaranteed ontological plenitude. This production of the Other as constitutive outside also reveals that the Self is only capable of achieving ontological fullness through a registration and capturing of difference as so many negative traces.

As Bhabha indicates, colonial power is a 'complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualises power' (Bhabha, 1997: 86). As a mode of representing and securing a cognitive certainty from the insecurable 'Otherness' of the Other, the colonial stereotype relies on visual pleasure (what Bhabha refers to as the scopic drive underpinning the colonial stereotype) that accompanies the pleasure in seeing and hence securing the Other who is located in direct distinction to the knowing colonial 'I'. For Bhabha, implicit, then, within the structure of the colonial stereotype is the exercise scopophilia, a form of visuality, associated with the demand to enframe the Other into a compulsory visibility and

knowability. Such enframements of the Other and of forms of Otherness are paramount and necessary to the panoptic visibility politics of colonial power relations, associated as they are with the exercise of colonial governmentality. This is because the relation of the Subject to the Other remains one of alterity in which there is always already a measure of non-recognition, non-encounter and hence, anxiety. As indicated, by enframing the Other and forms of Otherness into knowable thought forms, the certainty of the Other is thus secured and assured in the colonial stereotype. Because the alterity of the Other is always already resistant to meaning and totalizing forms of knowledge production, because Otherness is always resistant to be known absolutely and finally, for Bhabha, this resistance provokes the consequent repetitive urge to enframe, contain and categorize forms of Otherness into textual knowledge containers, which is intrinsic to the structure of the colonial stereotype where the precarious identifying of the 'I' begins to be enunciated and the unknowable alterity of the Other begins to be enframed.

Crucially, by resorting to these coordinates of knowledge, power and visibility, colonial stereotypical discourse, as a politics of calculative-representative thought, enables a seeming closure and coherence of the colonized via the colonial stereotype. The colonial stereotype is thus 'a method', as Bhabha argues, 'of controlling what seems to be a threat to some established view of things' (Bhabha, 1997: 73). As a politics of closure, and as a thinking guided by logocentric thought itself encoded by racial hierarchical thinking, the deployment of colonial stereotypical discourses in these photographs and travel narratives were also Self-consolidating and Self-confirming in that they drew on racial and cultural sentiments that had elsewhere sustained and legitimized European imperialism. As Ann Kaplan indicates, 'the western imagination already considered itself the only civilized culture before its representatives set out to have their convictions confirmed' (Kaplan, 1997: 61). Similarly, in his commentary to G. R. Lambert and Co.'s photographic recording of colonial Singapore and Southeast Asia, while Falconer (1987) note that these photographs favored the typical photographic taxonomic output of colonial topographical, landscape and portrait photography, he indicates that these photographic representations typified the Occidental and logocentric stereotypical vision of the East particularly the depiction of 'exotic races and customs'. According to Falconer (1987), what is undeniable is that '[I]n these photographs a number of

attitudes coexisted, among them a reinforcement of the romantic image of the East peopled by mysterious races and spiced with danger, a documentation of the (to Western eyes) barbaric and outlandish lives of remote tribes ripe for the civilizing benefits of European rule, and the optimistic Victorian belief in photography's unique advantages in expanding the frontier of knowledge by the detailed recording of pristine ethnological curiosities as yet unchanged' (Falconer, 1987: 31). The stereotyping of racial difference thus become one of the instituting moments of subjectivity, setting the limits between the egological 'I' and its Other. Within colonial stereotypical discourse, the 'immutable' racial difference of the racial Other thus announces and confirms the self-identity of the egological colonial 'I' but it is also a self-identity that must look outside for its confirmation and security.

To reiterate, these colonial photographs and travel narratives of the Tropical East draw in general on a binarised distinction between the civilized colonial metropolitan centre and the soon to be tamed tropical colonized periphery. While these narratives and photographs resorted to colonial visibility politics by deploying stereotypical gestures to impose a compulsory visibility on Otherness, what is also located in the deployment of these stereotypes is the devaluing of the Other via a logocentric gesture that privileges the first prior term. In these logocentric gestures inherent to Orientalist stereotypical discourses, what are doubtlessly set up and framed are the subject constitutions of the civilized European Self (the prior, 'superior' term) in relation to the oriental Other (the negated, 'inferior' term). As Culler notes:

> In oppositions such as meaning/form [...] nature/culture, intelligible/sensible, positive/negative, transcendental/empirical, serious/nonserious, the superior term belongs to the logos and is a higher presence; the inferior term marks a fall. Logocentrism thus assumes the priority of the first term and conceives the second in relation to it, as a complication, a negation, a manifestation, or a disruption to the first (Culler, 1998: 93).

In other words, underlying the deployment of the colonial stereotype in colonial visibility politics is the relationship between the observer (the seer) and the observed (the seen). This is a version of the relationship between the Self and Other and it is a relationship that is unequal and yet replete with power relations. As Derrida and Lacan have both demonstrated, the political and epistemological binaries implicit in

Western metaphysics are such that distinctions and value are marked across two terms. Simply, one term is marked with value and meaning while the other term is marked as the devalued term, the one without meaning. In this case, exemplified in the colonial stereotypes being pedaled in these photographs and travel narratives are the standard logocentric gestures where the colonial European Self as 'I' and sovereign is marked with value and given ontological status, worlded in short, while the colonized Other is marked as the uncivilized, Self-consolidating Other, an abjected outside and object.

To sum up, by exploring the colonial representations of colonial Singapore, I also explored how these representations are underscored by colonial stereotypical gestures. And entwined within the colonial stereotype is a preoccupation and obsession with information retrieval, associated with an unequivocal securing of the Other into a knowable thought form. Indeed, central to these stereotypical discourses is an obsessive epistemological curiosity with regard to gaining absolute knowledge on the alterity of the Other, itself a form of ontotheological thinking which is characterized, simply, as the Self-as-knowing and the Other (as secured thought object) which the Self thinks it knows. As mentioned, such is the desire for absolute knowledge that underpinning the colonial stereotype is this desire to impose a compulsory and absolute intelligibility on the Other. As a way to secure and enframe the Other's otherness, the colonial stereotype is a way to guarantee unequivocal knowledge because the knower, the 'Eye/I' of knowledge and power, requires a reassurance and certainty from the Other in order to assure the apodicity of its own self-certainty as knowing Sovereign (the I Am Who I Am). In the preceding section, I discussed how the worlding, namely the constitution of presence of the colonial 'I' as onto-theological Subject and Sovereign (I Am Who I Am) is dependent on the epistemic violence inherent to the representation of colonial space as a meaningless uninscribed space. In this section, I discuss how another aspect of guaranteeing presence and worlding of the colonial 'I' is dependent on the colonial stereotype. In Derridean terms, the colonial stereotype enacts the constitutive outside in which the colonized Other is marked as the devalued term, the Self-consolidating Other to the colonial 'I' as Subject.

Simply, implicit to the colonial stereotype is logocentric thought which is a form of thinking, onto-theologic in nature, and which takes as its project the securing of absolute knowledge of the Other who is, on the basis of its alterity, is always already insecurable. Central to this desire to impose absolute intelligibility on forms of Otherness, witnessed in the desire of colonial stereotypical discourse for a securing of the Other, is the epistemic violence of kataphatics that would claim to capture the essence of the Other in stereotypical concepts. Compelling this securing knowledge and identity of the Other, which is implicit in the colonial stereotype, is the desire of the onto-theologic subject, a subject of presence, who takes ultimate knowledge as a form of mastery or control, and who takes the actualization and enframement of the indeterminable alterity of the Other and forms of Otherness into a knowable thought form as the object of its comprehension and possession.

As indicated in the last section, such a form of thinking is a politics of the visible as terminality and calculability, a politics of closure that takes the form of eschatological thinking. As a form of thinking, the onto-theological subject, associated as it is to the logocentrism implicit in the installation of presence, seeks to be secure in its knowledge. This desire to be secure in knowledge and attain mastery of Otherness is central to colonial power relations that are compelled by a thinking underpinned by the desire for an epistemic self-coinciding certainty of presence. Such an onto-theological thinking is a politics of closure because onto-theological thinking is "always already a 'closed' system, knowing its beginning and end before it ever begins the task of thinking" (Robbins, 2002: 140). By seeking to secure and capture the alterity of the Other and forms of Otherness, implicit in the repetitive kataphatic gestures of the colonial stereotype, into entrenched knowable and determinate enframements, the onto-theologic subject strives to be and to know absolutely. As Robbins (2002) also indicates, such claims to absolute knowledge rests in an '[O]ntotheology [that] is secure in its knowledge, thinking it thinks on its own, and resting assured that its thinking is correct as long as it remains firmly entrenched in its clear and certain path. The path proceeds from a known origin to a known end, from the first cause to the highest being, or vice versa from God to certainty. As such, ontotheology remains a closed circle, keeping itself secure from the complicating truth of [...] the absence of presence, or the presence of absence' (Robbins, 2002: 141). In terms of its relation to Otherness, as exemplified in colonial

stereotypical gestures that aim to secure unconditioned certainty from that which is undecidable, as a politics of closure and onto-theology, the logocentric sovereign politics of the visible, that which is conditioned by eschatological thought, is underpinned by the evacuation of the trace of the Other and the suppression of difference and different modes of being in the world. In terms of politics, this onto-theologic form of thinking turns the political realm into, to borrow from Michael Dillon (1996), a 'domain of calculability in which political practices become exercises in the political arithmetic of representation of the things to be secured and of the calculuses which will secure them' (Dillon, 1996: 31). By programmatically prescribing and confining, in kataphatic stereotypical statements, the essence of the Other and forms of Otherness, politics is turned into an instrumental calculus of interest, which is one of the most effective ways to depoliticize politics. This is opposite to the conceptualization of the relation towards the Other and form of Otherness that Derrida speaks of, in which we are always already responsible to Otherness, where the Self and the 'We' undergo a transformation in an encounter with a radical alterity we are always hailed to and having to submit to. And this is especially so, as Dillon (1996) indicates, when "[J]ustice, [...] is the challenge to allow 'the always embodied other to appear as who is or she is" (Dillon, 1996: 107). At stake, then, is the imperialistic mastery and containment of otherness which is the complete opposite of the ethical stance that Judith Butler (2001) speaks of.

For Butler (2001), the ethical stance to Otherness, which is opposed to the relation to Otherness evinced in colonial stereotypical discourses, consist in knowing the limits of knowing and which speaks of a comportment of humility and generosity to forms of Otherness which cannot be contained in the here and now of the limits of our present-vision. Instead of containing forms of Otherness as a constituted and negated but knowable 'object' within the logocentric politics of the visible, the ethical stance would consists, for Butler (2001), 'in asking the question, "Who are you?" and continuing to ask the question without expectation of a full or final answer' (Butler, 2001: 28). Instead, Butler (2001) argues that we should suspend hasty judgments when we rush too readily to summarize an Other's life or apprehend and contain Otherness into forms of knowability: '[A]s we ask to know the Other, or ask that the Other say, finally, who he or she is, it will be important not to expect an answer that will ever satisfy. By not pursuing satisfaction, and by letting the question hang open,

even enduring, we let the Other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it. If letting the Other live is part of a new definition of recognition, then this version of recognition would be one that is based less on knowledge that on an apprehension of its limits' (Butler, 2001: 28). In Chapter 4, I pursue this line of thought, which I suggest is akin to a 'writing in blindness', particularly when we attempt to read the indecipherability of the Other and forms of Otherness that remain to us unknowable, an Other to the visible. In pursuing this line of thought, I consider how this speaks of a politics that is opposite to the politics of the visible as eschatology and which is practiced by an onto-theologic subject. This other politics, as I suggest in Chapter 4, is the politics of the invisible as eschatological desire. In the next section, the conclusion, I will sum up by briefly considering the wider aspects of the politics of the visible, which I have been referring to in the last two sections as been associated with an onto-theologic politics, namely a politics of closures that adheres to the logocentric metaphysic of presence.

Conclusion: Colonial worlding as a Politics of the Visible and the Writing of Light

In this chapter, to better understand the political disposition and the practices of closures lurking within the practices of the visible, I have located this exploration to the colonial Singaporean context. The turn to the Singaporean material emerges out of a biographical locatedness. Because it allows a sense of the particular historical canvas of identity-securing practices, the turn to the Singaporean context enables an investigation of the colonial worlding and the connections to be drawn between this worlding and the politics of the visible which is the main aim underpinning this chapter. While I located the exploration of the politics of the visible to the colonial context in Singapore, I do not mean to imply that this investigation of visibility politics should be taken as representative of other colonies or cultures. But neither am I suggesting that the discussion of the politics of the visible and the understanding of such a politics should be limited to the colonial Singaporean context. In the next chapter, I discuss how the multicultural politics of postcolonial Singapore display a politics of the visible, which is contested by TheatreWorks intercultural performances

such as *Desdemona. Desdemona*, I suggest, intervenes and puts into question the community securing practice implicit in the politics of Singaporean multiculturalism.

What the colonial context allowed me to explore was an aspect of the politics of the visible, an exploration which was prompted by the 'visceral shock' of encounter with the epistemic violence implicit in the inscription beneath the Raffles statue. I used this encounter with the inscription as a springboard to locate the investigation in the chapter. The chapter considers the epistemic violence inherent in that inscription beneath the Raffles statue and connects it to an aspect of the politics of the visible. I suggest one aspect is the exercise of colonial worlding, which is associated to worlding of the onto-theological subject as Sovereign and Subject. As a politics of the visible, the metaphysics of presencing inherent in that worlding is a form of politics that is guided by the coordinates of vision, power and knowledge (*voir-pouvoir-savoir*) and is driven by a political disposition compelled by the desire to master the alterity of the Other and forms of Otherness. For example, by rendering colonial space as a meaningless receptacle, colonial inscription of meaning and the worlding of the colonial 'I' as Sovereign and Subject is made possible and plausible.

In addition, I also discussed how colonial travelers participated both in the worlding of the imperial 'I' as knowing Sovereign Subject. I suggested that this worlding is associated with the other imperial project, namely the steady reduction of the colonial world to containers of stereotypical knowledge. As an identity-securing practice, this reduction by securing Otherness via the colonial stereotype is suggestive of a political mastery of Otherness, exemplified by the imposition of cognitive certainty and compulsory knowability by which radical ambiguity and the Other's otherness represented are reduced. This securing of uncertainty, entailing a closure and a mastery of Otherness, makes possible the imperial worlding of the onto-theological subject which seeks to be 'secure in its knowledge, thinking it thinks on its own and resting assured that its thinking is correct as long as it remains firmly entrenched in its clear and certain path' (Robbins, 2002: 141). Such a practice of politics, that which is underpinned by an onto-theology, is related to the desire and the imperialistic effort to 'have the world at our disposal' (Hughes, 2003: 531). As Hughes (2003) also observes, this is a 'theology of mastery' (Hughes, 2003: 531) and such a politics partakes in a political subjectivity, the formulation of which is the I

Am Who I Am – the conflation of colonial European Man with the transcendental signifier.

In terms of the worlding of the onto-theological subject as presence and Sovereign, what is disclosed in this theology of mastery is the process of photology, the writing of light and presence, associated with the demand of visibility and absolute knowability of the Sovereign 'I' as Author-Creator from the Other, just as the alterity of the Other is diminished and evacuated. Let me explain a little. The initial guiding question that organized this chapter was: what are the politics of the visible underpinning colonial Man's worlding? I suggested earlier that the visibility politics refers to the 'metaphysics of presence' encoded within colonial Man's presencing as transcendental subject. For Derrida, the conceptualization of sovereignty is itself a logocentric ethnocentrism through which the West in part defines itself and for Derrida, metaphysics is itself a 'white mythology' (Derrida, 1986b: 213). For Derrida, central to Western metaphysical thought are metaphors of light, the sun and darkness which, for Derrida, is a founding metaphor of Western metaphysics which is that of photology: '[...] the metaphor of darkness and light (of self-revelation and self-concealment), the founding metaphor of Western philosophy as metaphysics. The founding metaphor not only because it is a photological one – and in this respect the entire history of philosophy is a photology, the name given to a history of, or treatise on, light [...]' (Derrida, 1978a: 31). As Derrida also indicates, light is also conceived in terms of heliocentrism, the light of the sun:

> The very opposition of appearing and disappearing, the entire lexicon of the *phaniesthai*, of *aletheia*, etc., of day and night, of the visible and the invisible, of the present and the absent – all that is possible only under the sun (Derrida, 1982: 251).

As Derrida explains, the light associated with heliocentrism characterizes Western metaphysical thought: '[T]he sensory sun, which rises in the East, becomes interiorized in the evening of its journey, in the eye and heart of the Westerner. He summarizes, assumes and achieves the essence of man, "illuminated by the true light"' (Derrida, 1982: 268). Western metaphysical thought, for Derrida, is thus cast as the writing of the light of 'white mythology' and metaphysics not only reflects the imperialist cultural aspirations of the West but also the metaphysics of presence for whom all those that fall beyond the light of this logos is associated with indeterminate

darkness and absence and which must be overcome and brought into the light of the visible and knowable. Parenthetically, in terms of the metaphysical foundations of the epistemic authoritization of photographic practices, Cadava (1992), for example, draws our attention to the photograph as exemplifying a photological discourse. The photograph, for Cadava, is itself intertwined with philosophy and particularly Western Metaphysics. The metaphysical foundation of the photograph, itself relayed by the trope of light, becomes the figure of knowledge and visibility and is encoded with a solar language of cognition that gives us access to the visible and knowable world. As Cadava (1992) notes, "[T]here has never been a time without the photograph, without the residue and writing of light. If in the beginning we find the Word, this Word has always been a Word of light – the 'let there be light' without which there would be no history" (Cadava, 1992: 87). As Batchen (1999) usefully explains it, the word 'photography' is itself a compound of two Greek components – '*phos* (light) and *graphie* (writing, drawing, and delineation) – photography is significant on a number of levels. As a word, it posits a paradoxical condition of "light" (sun, God, nature) and "writing" (history, humankind, culture), an impossible binary opposition "fixed" in uneasy conjunction only by the artifice of language' (Batchen, 1999). Very simply, for the purposes of this chapter, this 'metaphysical light' underlying the practices of the visible construes a certain relationship between visibility (knowledge), subjectivity (as a desire for self-certifying presence), the securing of absolute knowledge, the desire for origins and closures and reflects, as well as repeats, the anxieties and desires of the onto-theologic subject for purity, stability in meaning-foundations and a drive to create a world in its own image. In short, underwriting the 'white mythology' that Derrida speaks of is the desire and the will to absolute knowledge and power. And as a politics, this 'writing of the light' relates to the onto-theologic politics of the visible. Simply, the desire coursing through politics of the visible is that of imperial ontotheological desire manifested as the desire to know, to see and to have absolutely – a logocentric politics of mastery and power which is in direct contrast to the eschatological desire that I explore in Chapter 4.

To return to the guiding question of this chapter, namely, the politics of the visible underpinning colonial Man's worlding as the 'presencing' of the I Am Who I Am, earlier in my discussion of colonial worlding, I suggested that the visibility politics refers to colonial Man's presencing. In terms of the political rhetoric of colonial

worlding, I would like to suggest that this is guided by photological practices in terms of the writing of the light of presence (namely, worlding), the condition of possibility of which is guided by the demand to secure absolute visibility and intelligibility of Other's otherness. As indicated, the solar language underpinning the 'writing of light' thus speaks of the desire to see, to know absolutely and to render Otherness visible and certainty. As a practice of colonial visibility politics, the photological practices of colonial thought is premised on the desire to know and to secure information, enabling at the same time a 'worlding' and representation of the colony as visible and intelligible colonial object of knowledge. The colony is thus 'represented', worlded and made representable by her imperial masters, making possible the exercise of colonial governmentality. As Derrida notes, '[T]he "re-" of *repraesentatio* also expresses the movement that accounts for – "renders reason to" – a thing whose presence is encountered by rendering present, by bringing it to the subject of representation, to the knowing self' (Derrida, 1983: 10). The desire to see and make present belongs to the onto-theologic subject as a self-as-knowing who desires to know, enframe and make present an object as representation. As suggested, presupposed by this politics of the visible is the onto-theologic politics of absolute knowing – a politics of mastery. And as Rubenstein (2003) suggests in her discussion of apophaticism and ontotheology, one of the 'mainstays of ontotheology [is] the self-as-knowing, and the "God" which the self knows: thinking subject and thought object' (Rubenstein, 2003: 389). But also presupposed, as indicated, and instituted by this desire to see and know is the institution of a binarised relation between the seer and the seen, which is the condition of possibility by which the onto-theologic subject of desire is worlded as a presence who *is* (I Am Who I Am). In terms of the political foundations of this kind of thought, because it absolutizes itself and seeks to secure its sovereign subjectivity, the onto-theologic foundations of the transcendental subject is (only) made possible by securing the Other as the ground on which security is premised. In terms of the wider political ramifications of the metaphysical foundations underlying this onto-theologic thinking, Michael Dillon (1996) indicates:

> A ground is sought that will explain the emergence of some-thing, allow us to judge exactly what it is, and measure the inevitable variation in its appearance against how that ground tells us it 'really' is. And, of course, if this is done, if we can securely determine how something is something

rather that nothing, then we have mastered it. [...] We are driven to mastery of the world because of the way we have expressed puzzlement about it, and comported ourselves towards it in search of a certain kind of truth about it, and each other within it. This is what directs us to make the world secure. If this is our question – the question that makes us the 'we' of the 'West' – then we must secure security (Dillon, 1996: 19-20).

For example, one way in which this worlding and securing of the 'I Am Who I Am' is made possible is the representation of colonial space as a meaningless space, a supplementary receptacle upon which meaning could be inscribed and on which the installation of sovereignty of presence is secured and made possible. Another way the certainty of onto-theologic subject is secured and made possible is via the identity-securing practices of the colonial stereotype, itself a politics of calculative-representative thought that takes the power of developing comprehensive knowledge of Otherness as a form of mastery or control of the Other. In other words, the onto-theologic politics of the colonial politics of the visible is a metaphysics of presencing and, as suggested, partakes in the formulation of the sovereignty of 'I Am Who I Am' where the semantic field involved is the verb 'to be' – a constative statement where we witness the self-identification of colonial Man with the transcendental signified who is thus produced as the stable centre, the regulator of meaning and difference. This metaphysical sovereign politics underscore dogmatic certitudes and the underlying violences toward heterogeneity accompanying them are also synonymous with a political subjectivity compelled by a metaphysical politics of the visible. Indeed, as Michael Dillon (1996) suggests, metaphysical (Western) sovereign politics "shows how we understand as we do because we exist as we do. Understanding as we do in the way we exist, we came, in the tradition of the 'West', to think metaphysically. Metaphysics asked about the truth of Being, of what is, but answered with an account of the truth of the Being of beings, that is to say of things we find present at hand" (Dillon, 1996: 84-85). This ontotheological assertion of the Western subject as Sovereign and Subject, of the writing of the metaphysical light of Western of the political subject of Western Man, discloses a mode of being in the world which is correlative with a being with others, a mode of being underpinned with a violent and proprietorial claim over the Other, the counterpart of which is the attempt to secure knowledge of forms of Otherness and so dispelling doubt. And as Michael Dillon

already indicates, '[M]etaphysics, then, is the masque of mastery; securing some foundation upon which to establish the sum total of what is knowable with certainty, and conforming one's everyday conduct [...] to the foundation so secured [...] The essence of metaphysics then, is nihilistic [...] precisely because it does not matter what you secure so long as security itself is secured. That is to say, so long as things are made certain, mastered and thereby controllable' (Dillon, 1996: 20 -21). The politics of the visible, seen in this light, as that which is guided by a *technicity*, emanating from the realm of calculable-representative thought, underpinned by a 'fundamental mathesis' and the specification of the eschaton, discloses a political disposition guided by an onto-theologic politics of Absolute Knowing and mastery.

Yet, the condition of possibility by which the subject be-comes and is installed as stable sovereign presence who masters difference is also the condition of its own impossibility. This is because also underscoring this onto-theologic desire for presence, fullness and mastery is that of a politics as lack. Let me explain a little. Kearney (2001) for example, characterizes this ontotheological desire as a desire-as-lack and he quotes Kojeve by way of clarifying this desire-as-lack: "[T]he I of desire is an emptiness greedy for content; an emptiness that wants to be filled by what is full, to be filled by emptying this fullness, to put oneself – once it is filled – in place of this fullness, to occupy with its fullness the emptiness caused by overcoming the fullness that was not its own' (Kearney, 2001: 141). Indeed, the onto-theologic mastery and imperialist grasping of the alterity of the Other is the basis upon which the founding and the worlding of the colonial 'I' as Sovereign and Subject is made possible through its logocentric identification with the object of study, in this case, the colonized Other who is conceived as the exteriority and the deviation of the colonial 'I'. But this also implies an ex-centricity of colonial presencing especially when the Other, the constitutive outside, then becomes the symbolic support who confers on the Subject an ontological consistency. Underlying this politics of the visible as closure and mastery is, as indicated, an onto-theologic claim to an identity as self-coinciding presence. But this mastery of self-coinciding identity is un-securable as an Otherness resides within itself. However, this onto-theologic 'I' is only made possible by the colonized Other who is encrypted as the supplementary vessel, the condition of possibility by which the auto-biographing of colonial Man as transcendental subject is made possible. But as Derrida has constantly reminded us, the constitutive

outside forever prevents and unsettles the ontotheological desire of the subject who demands absolute self-certifying presence, who desires to be absolutely (being-as-self-presence). This ensures that the moment of constitution and the desire for closure never quite arrives. From Derrida, we learn that this failure of constitution always accompanies and co-exists with the subject. In short, underpinning all these logocentric forms of securing of certainty is the dependence of these forms of worlding of presence and sovereignty of the knowing 'Eye/I' on the constitutive outside. As Robbins (2002) puts it bluntly, '[T]he mistake of ontotheology is [that] it thinks itself complete' (Robbins, 2002: 143). And as Rubenstein (2003) argues, the logocentrism underpinning ontotheology is a totalizing discourse, especially when 'co-extensive with the totalizing metaphysical order [...] is the logocentric "sublimation of the trace" – an imperialistic discourse that clings to an impossible "presence" by denying the absence that constitutes it' (Rubenstein, 2003: 390). Simply, by constituting the colonized as Other and hence the outside, the deviation to the Self, the identity and security of the knowing subject is rendered insecure. This is because in order for an object to have an identity it must be in relation to an 'Other', to an outside. But because the object depends on its 'Other' to be, the Other also frustrates the ontological fullness of the identity of the object, and this constitutive outside is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of the object attaining a complete identity and self-coinciding certainty. In short, the self-certainty of the knowing 'I' is thus organized around a lack and such a politics, a politics of the visible as onto-theological thinking, is a mis-recognition as it hides itself from the lack that constitutes it.

Finally, this chapter's discussion about the metaphysical foundations of the onto-theologic worlding of the colonial 'I', as that which is chiasmically dependent on the securing of a comprehensive knowledge of Otherness is of more than mere academic interest. As Dillon argues, at stake is the question about our ethical comportment to the question of the limit and closures. Crucially, this also includes our relation, our comportment to the Other and forms of Otherness: '[H]ow we think and what we do, what we think and how we are doing, condition one another' (Dillon, 1996: 27). As Dillon explains, underlying this onto-theologic form of thinking is a metaphysical foundation and at stake is our disposition to the questions of limit and the authoritative imposition of closures which is a 'fatally deterministic thinking to

which the issue of limits ordinarily gives rise in onto-theologic thought' (Dillon, 1996: 26). Do we then submit to the impositions of closures and the problem of the closure to Otherness and if we do, does this not spell the closing down of 'what is possible to say, to do, and be in virtue of the operations of it' (Dillon, 1996: 26)? At stake too in this thinking of the limit, the eschaton and the limit condition, is the question and the appraisal of our comportment and responsibility to the challenges posed by the radical alterity of the Other. Such an alterity introduces us to an otherness of the onto-theologic politics of the visible and takes us away from the thematics of self-certifying identity formation and imperialistic possession. This Otherness, an otherwise of the visible, which I refer to as a writing in blindness and is opened up by the challenge of radical alterity, is a question I take up in Chapter 4. In the next chapter, I briefly look at another aspect of the politics of the visible, namely the identity securing practices of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism. While I suggest that these identity securing practices is a form of a kataphatic discourse, I also suggest that this form of closure is resisted or questioned by TheatreWorks *Desdemona*. As a performance, *Desdemona* enacts a heterotopic space that resists the visibility politics of postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism and in so doing, exemplifies the politics of resistances that Foucault speaks of. By performing a resistance to the visibility politics of Singaporean multiculturalism, the representational space of *Desdemona* introduces us to an aspect of the politics of the invisible, which is aligned to the apophatic boldness poetics, associated with a refusal to close down the questions of who are 'We' of the community.

Chapter 3

Moving out of Sight: TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*

> The body is to be compared, not to the physical object, but to the work of art.
>
> Merleau-Ponty

> The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future.
>
> Levinas

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, I explored the metaphysical sovereign politics lurking within colonial practices of thinking the Other and otherness. I explored how, in the colonial Singaporean context, colonial photographic practices and colonial travel writing partakes in a worlding of the onto-theological Western subject as presence and Sovereign – the I Am Who I Am. Intertwined with this onto-theological worlding is the transubstantiation of the Other into an absolute knowability linked in part to enframing the otherness of the Other within a horizon of visibility, the totality of Sameness. The broader implications of this onto-theological worlding of the sovereign I Am Who I Am is suggestive of the metaphysical political disposition co-essential with a technologised totalitarian way of securing the Other, itself underscored with an onto-theological proprietorial desire to secure and master Absolute knowledge of the Other's otherness. Such a metaphysical desire is a desire coordinated by violence. This violence, lurking in the metaphysical sovereign politics, is a violent way of being in the world and being with others, characterized by a violent and hostile disposition towards alterity and Otherness and which also takes the form of exploitation and the imperialistic process of securing material proprietorial rights of territories. As Campbell and Dillon (1993) explain, such is the violence

lurking in metaphysical politics, the *ultima ratio* of politics, that this violence finds its counterpart in a political subjectivity that betrays a violent disposition toward alterity 'because of its foundational requirement to be hostile toward heterogeneity' (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 8-10). Indeed, as Dillon (1996) explains, this violent disposition toward alterity and heterogeneity also finds its other philosophical counterpart which is a *technicity* characterized by the 'dominance of representative-calculative thought of modern subjectivity in which truth is a measure of adequation of the correspondence between the thinking subject's assertions and entities themselves [...] Hence, the absolute centrality of the subject in the modern age' (Dillon, 1996: 85). Indeed, this *technicity* is not construed as the 'technological', namely the usage of scientific instruments. Instead, it is indicative of a mode of calculative instrumental reasoning suggestive of a mode of practice and a way of bringing things into presence and the horizon of the visible via an enframing. *Technicity*, as Stuart Elden (2001a) explains, is 'the essence of modern technology, which is not in itself technological, but is a way of seeing things as calculable, mathematical, extended and therefore controllable' (Elden, 2001a: 79). Technology, as a way of bringing and assembling things together, is suggestive of a calculative en-framing (Elden, 2001a). Thus construed, *technicity* is metaphysical in its dimensions and predicates (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 21).

Similarly, for Critchley (1993), this alignment between technology and politics, namely the technologisation of politics and the technologised totalitarian politicization of all social life, indicates that not only is all social life politicized but that this politicization takes a political form construed as 'totalitarian' (Critchley, 1993: 75). Implicit in this totalitarian form of thinking is politics characterized as a technological domination of 'rational calculability and planning; the triumph of instrumental reason [...] which manifests itself as an infinite desire to master nature and dominate the earth, and where the human being becomes simply raw material in a never-ending consumption' (Critchley, 1993: 76). In addition, Elden (2001a) notes, '[T]he modern concept of the political is, like the modern attitude to technology, [...] has its essence in modern ways of being. The gas chambers and extermination camps, the blockades and the hydrogen bomb, all exhibit the political thinking of the friend/enemy distinction' (Elden, 2001a: 78). Implicit, then, in this totalitarian political disposition is a 'homogenization of all areas of human life into complete uniformity'

(Critchley, 1993: 76). Implied in this form of politics is the curtailment of uncertainty, the production of a Manichean binarised thinking of Self/Other distinctions and a thinking aimed at rational cognition and the affirmation of unconditioned certainty.

As a form of politics, the *technicity* central to metaphysical sovereign politics is an impoverished way of being in the world and being with others: '[T]echnology is the mounting oblivion of the aletheic truth of the Being of human being, and the radical impoverishment of human being's capacity to create and live in a world, a condition globalised by the ballistic power of technology's trajectory. *We, therefore, think the political in the way that we do because of the way that we think*' (Dillon, 1996: 85). And this technological mode of thinking and being in the world lurks within the onto-theologic politics of the visible. As a politics of the calculable, metaphysical visibility politics construes the relation to Otherness, as suggested in Chapter 2, in an imperialistic proprietorial relationship in which the relationship between the Self and the Other is approached on the Self's own terms – an ontological totalitarian disposition. In this onto-theologic relationship, the Self is thus given a priority over the Other and promotes as it guarantees a self-possessed enframed Sovereign subjectivity. However, what is constantly foreclosed and threatened by this metaphysical mode of thinking Otherness is the call of and the response to the Other. Crucially, this alternate mode of being with the Other, an Other that is otherwise than 'us' is distinguished by a conception of Justice which, as Dillon explains it, is characterized by a '[L]istening-out for its call, and listening-in to what has already been said in response to it, our relation to Justice remains radically hermeneutical as well' (Dillon, 1996: 109). In this chiasmus of a Derridean and Levinasian conception of Justice and the ethical, what is opposed is that of a metaphysical political thinking, proprietorial in nature when it encounters Otherness. What is welcomed instead is a relation with the Other, a way of being with the Other that is also underlined by a call to Justice. This 'call' is characterized by an ethical relation where, to put it in Dillon's words, 'we are called upon, and put under a claim that we cannot escape even when evading or corrupting it' (Dillon, 1996: 109). In this ethical comportment toward the Other and forms of Otherness, our subjectivity, our Selves are always already traversed by the Other and an ineradicable Otherness. As Levinas acknowledges, while our relationship to the Other is often one of violence and oppression, he also indicates that 'the relation to the other, as a relation of

responsibility, cannot be totally suppressed, even when it takes the form of politics or warfare' (Levinas, 1989: 247). Ethics, in this sense, takes a responsible, non-totalizing relation with the Other and this space of obligation to alterity and heterogeneity is opened up and enacted in factical life. As Caputo (1988) explains it, '[E]thics constitutes the world in the first place [...] To put it in terms I would prefer, the space of obligation is opened up by factical life, by the plurality of living bodies, by the commerce and intercourse of bodies with bodies, and above all, in these times of holocaust and of killing fields, by bodies in pain – but no less by thriving and flourishing bodies, by bodies in play' (Caputo, 1988: 167). Consequently, this ethical relation to the Other is opposed to the other ethic, the ethic of technologised politics which is founded on a totalitarian thinking and enacted in a 'violence against difference; against all that in the world which resists incorporation *into*, or appropriation by, technology's insistent desire to eradicate doubt caused by heterogeneity and radical alterity as it promotes the possessively self-possessed efficiently enframed subjectivity which is thought to be the guarantee of its own existence' (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 19). Instead, the ethical relation with the Other, a relation characterized as a radical relation with the radical *non*-relational (Dillon, 2000: 5), is one in which responsibility and Justice take on a non-totalizable character. The ethical relation to alterity and heterogeneity is a responsibility that cannot be dismissed, it cannot be suppressed, cannot be opted out of: "it is impossible to free myself by saying, 'It's not my concern'. There is no choice, for it is always and inescapably my concern. This is a unique 'no choice', one that is not slavery" (Levinas, 1989: 247).

In this chapter, I consider this other way of being-with the Other and forms of Otherness. This other way of being with Otherness moves away from the onto-theological politics underpinning the metaphysical *politics of the visible*. This relation to the Other, non-proprietorial in nature, relates to an apophasis compelled by a thinking at the limits and a desire to think beyond the limit-condition. This mode of being-with the Other is related to a mode of thinking the political as that which is chiasmically intertwined with that of a radical hermeneutic poetic imagination, itself conditioned by a poetics of the possible. This is a *mode* that could be characterized by a relationship with the Other that is construed as a 'radical relation with the radically non-relational' (Dillon, 2000: 5).

Poetics

For the purposes of the chapter, to think through poetics, thought here as a thinking coordinated by a desire to think the otherwise, recall the agonal nature of Fanon's questions in the introduction to the thesis. I bring up Fanon because his agonal subjectivity informs one of the points of departure for the thesis and this chapter. Such an agonal subjectivity could be better described, to borrow a phrase from Fanon (1990), as the 'zone of occult instability' (Fanon, 1990: 183). While Fanon uses this phrase to describe the nature of anti-colonial culture-as-political-struggle and the zone of in-betweeness in which the colonized dwell, Homi Bhabha (1997) also indicates, in his discussion of Third Space, that this 'zone of occult instability' could serve as a critique to the desire for wanting to view culture as a pure, unitary and closed, a mode of thinking compelled by a totalitarian thinking that disavows ambivalence, difference and heterogeneity. I want to suggest that this zone of 'occult instability', of in-betweeness could also usefully describe postcolonial subjectivity, a subjectivity of in-betweeness that is 'palimpsestuously encoded' with the memories of the colonial past, associated as it is with overdetermined inscriptions of identity, and the consequent postcolonial agonal struggle with the demands and the imposed limitations of both that past and the present. In short, as a struggle, this agonal subjectivity is often accompanied by a resistance to dominant attempts to encode official ways of being, a struggle against the impositions of limit-conditions. However, limitations are also conditions of possibility. While imposed limits are oppressive, they are also enabling in that they are conditions of possibility for re-thinking who we are and what we are. While the subject is a subject formed by power, and imposed limitations render the subject a knowable and calculable subject, his or her possibility to be is also indebted to those imposed limits. Consequently, practices of resistances to those imposed limits, while oppositional, are also affirmative, in that these practices are also a condition of freedom, enabling the exploration of what it means to be and to be-come otherwise. This agonism, that of a struggle against imposed limits, is compelled by a desire to think beyond the limit-condition. This, then, is the agonism of the subject whose being in the world and be-coming is indebted to and yet made possible by those limits, and who seeks to transgress those imposed limits in order to fashion other possible forms of subjectivities and being with the Other.

However, a critical vigilance is required. As Spivak describes it, in occupying the decolonized space, the dilemmas faced by the postcolonial subject resembles that of 'the confused and anonymous European of the nineteenth century, who no longer knows himself or what name he should adopt' (Spivak, 1990: 224). In addition, Spivak (1990) emphasizes that while there is no neutral starting point, on the other hand, one has to begin somewhere even if that somewhere has to start with the inhabitation of a text that has been authoritatively encoded elsewhere. She also cautions that this inhabitation would require 'the greatest vigilance' (Spivak, 1990: 223-4). In other words, I would hazard a suggestion that this vigilance refers to, in the agonism of attempting to 'found' or promote new forms of subjectivities, avoiding the temptation, on the one hand, of succumbing to a nostalgia of lost origins and secondly, of been vigilant to the temptations to revert or transcend to yet another essentialist or homogenized presencing of an identity which would spell a reversion and return to metaphysical absolutism. But to return to the question of postcolonial subjectivity, I want to suggest that such a subjectivity, agonal in nature, could be thought in certain instances as compelled by a poetics of the (im)possible. Like the question of being: 'What does it mean to be?', the agonal question of postcolonial subjectivity: 'What am I? Who am I?' is associated to a critical ontology that is disposed towards a desire to think both the otherwise and the unthought, of fashioning other alternatives and possibilities of being and be-coming otherwise. This relation, the attempt to think the unthought, the impossible and the not-yet, is that of poetics, of re-thinking a way of being-with Otherness. This poetics, by moving beyond the violence intrinsic to the metaphysical politics of the visible, is understood in this chapter as a radical relation with the radically non-relational. This radical relation is construed here as an apophaticism of poiesis. And for the purposes of the chapter, to better enable a consideration of the apophaticism of poetics, I turn to a postcolonial Singaporean performance, in this case, TheatreWorks' performance of *Desdemona*.

In this chapter's exploration of TheatreWorks *Desdemona*, I ask: what ethic does this performance call into play? In reflecting on *Desdemona*, while I suggest that it offers a particularly exemplary site to study the tensions between the multicultural and intercultural, what is explored in this performance is a practice of the invisible, an aspect of which is a radical relation with the radically non-relational. As I suggest,

implicit in the representational space of this TheatreWorks performance is that of the performance of the inoperative community, the opening of the radical relation with the radically non-relational, namely a poetics. As a practice of the invisible, the incommensurability-vision of poetics discloses a thinking at the limit and exemplifies a space of radical openness that resists the onto-theological demand for ready-made closures. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I explore how this thinking at and beyond the limit is underlined by an eschatological desire, suggestive of a politics which is in itself coordinated by a radical relation brought about by the challenge of radical alterity.

But for the purposes here, to enable this chapter's exploration of TheatreWorks *Desdemona* and its exemplification of the apophaticism of a poetics, itself coordinated by the politics of the invisible, I draw on a range of theorists. I do so because of the critical purchase these thinkers provide me in my attempt to think through the relation with the radically non-relational of poetics and its entwinement with a thinking of the political. Seemingly contradictory at first sight, the thinkers I draw on share a way of thinking which remains different from that of representative-calculative thought, providing me an opportunity to think an otherwise of the onto-theological politics of the visible. In doing so, these thinkers allow me to think through the political disposition required and compelled by the politics of the invisible. To start with, this chapter draws its initial point of inspiration, and critical point of departure, from Lefebvre's (2000) account of *les espaces de representation.* I am inspired by Lefebvre (2000) primarily in what he has to say about *les espaces de representation* which I refer to in this chapter as representational spaces. However, I want it to be noted that this chapter is not about to attempt a critical assessment or critical interlocution of Lefebvre's theorization of space.[1] Instead, what Lefebvre (2000) allows me to think through is the affirmative potential of representational spaces. As was discussed in Chapter 1, for Lefebvre (2000), these representational spaces are distinguished by the lived spaces of the body. These lived spaces refer to "the lived spaces of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists" (Lefebvre, 2000: 39). As the nodal point, the *point de capiton*, these lived spaces of the body-subject interrogate and constitute the social symbolic in a two-way movement, in which the

[1] For a critical assessment of Lefebvre, one could turn to for example, Elden (2001), Elden (2001a), Soja (1989) and Gregory (1994).

essentialist divisions between the two are critically interrogated. What is suggestive in this conceptualization of representational spaces, to recall the earlier comment by Caputo (1988), is the opening of and the summons to factical social life, the space of obligation and connectivity opened up by a being with others, spaces coordinated by the plurality of affective bodies with different relational capacities to affect and be affected. As lived factical spaces, representational spaces, as Lefebvre indicates, are alive, dynamic and fluid, continually modified by the affectivity of the body-subject's inhabitation of social space:

> Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an effective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house: or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently, it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic (Lefebvre, 2000: 42).

As was discussed, the locus of representational space is the lived, embodied space of the body-subject. While the body-subject is open to multiple territorialisations, the space upon which multiple, interrelated meanings are inscribed and reinscribed, it is also an expressive subject, the ground of human action and yet also the ground and site of power plays and subjection made possible and plausible. Representational space, as Lefebvre (2000) suggests in a metaphor, is better described as a lived and embodied *theatrical space* which he also terms the Third Space, 'mediated yet directly experienced, which infuses the work and the moment, is established as such through the dramatic action itself' (Lefebvre, 2000: 188). For Lefebvre, representational space or third space emanates from and is mediated by the lived spaces of the body-subject. Indeed, as was discussed earlier, the lived space of the body-subject is the space of potentiality and possibility. The body, then, is not passive object. Affective bodies occupy, produce and re-produce themselves in multiple real, imaginary and symbolic spaces. While such spaces are never innocent of power, neither are they totally devoid of practices of resistances. The body-subject, in short, is a space and it creates spatialities and affects space. As Lefebvre (2000) explains: '[T]here is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before

producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space' (Lefebvre, 2000: 170).

Representational space thus emanates from the nodal point of the affective body – it is the site that is actively experienced and lived, locating moreover, the critical ontological struggle to be-come otherwise which names firstly, the struggle to be otherwise from past inscriptions and secondly, the struggle to be otherwise from present official discursive codifications and inscriptions of identity on the body. It is in this drama of the lived, factical representational space of the body-subject 'in which man sees himself as an actor. It is under the weight of his whole existence, which includes facts on which there is no turning back, that man will say his yes or his no' (Levinas, 1990: 70). While such a mode of thinking about representational space forms the undercurrent of this chapter, what is also suggestive of this potency of representational space is the possibility of moving away from the representative-calculative *technicity* of onto-theological thinking of politics. Indeed, as a point of departure, this mode of thinking the potency of representational space allows me to think through this question: what ethic does *Desdemona*'s representational space call into play? My wager is that, as a lived, embodied theatrical space, *Desdemona*'s representational space offers a thinking coordinated by that of poetics. Poetics, as Kearney (1998) construes it, is dynamic and irrepressible, motivated by the desire for a be-coming that is also the condition of possibility for the practice of freedom of human being expressed by the desire for possibility and the exploration for the otherwise in which we may poetically dwell with the Other (Kearney, 1998). On account of *Desdemona*'s intercultural performance practice where every performer becomes an Other, the poetics of this representational space brings alterity and heterogeneity into play and encounter, and what is suggestive of *Desdemona*'s poetics is that of the ethical role played by poetics. As Campbell and Dillon (1993) indicate, 'the struggle for the political [...] can be no other than an ethical engagement with human being' (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 17). Compelled by a poetics of the (im)possible and an ethical desire of relating to the radical non-relational, such is ethics of the poetic imagination that it is coordinated by the challenge to imagine Other(s) differently. To approach the challenge of welcoming

the alterity of the Other is also to imagine the Other: 'to imagine the other is to imagine *differently*, it is, in itself, an ethical gesture of welcoming what is different (*dia-legein*). In this sense, hermeneutic imagination can be said to open a special place in which poetics and ethics may convene' (Kearney, 1995: xvi).

In order to better think through the potentiality of *Desdemona*'s representational space which is, as I will suggest, located in the challenge to imagine the otherwise, this chapter brings in thinkers who allow me to think through the struggle to be-come otherwise, to think the non-yet that is opened up by the question of the relation with the radical non-relational, a relation opened up by poetics. In my reflection on *Desdemona*'s representational space, what these thinkers, Foucault and Kearney for example, allow me to think through is that of poetic capacity. Lurking in these thinkers is the idea of the agonism of critical ontology which is underpinned by a poetic – that of a thinking at the limit. For the purposes of the chapter, I suggest that what is disclosed by *Desdemona*'s representational space is the inoperative community, suggestive of the opening up of a community-to-come.

In terms of the organization of the chapter, in the next section, I discuss the Singaporean way of multiculturalism which, I suggest, betrays a practice of the visible. This discussion provides the initial staging enabling me to move on to the next section where I discuss the practice of resistance intrinsic to *Desdemona* interculturalism. In that section I suggest how *Desdemona*'s interculturalism speaks of an ethics of alterity that is compelled by raising the question of community. By posing the question of community, I suggest that the representational space of *Desdemona* exemplifies the in-operative community. Moreover, by indicating that *Desdemona* speaks of an ethics of alterity, I suggest that this performance engages with the apophaticism of poetics, itself a radical relation with the radical non-relational. In short, I explore the idea that *Desdemona* is suggestive of a practice of the invisible, a practice compelled by that of the poetic imagination.

The Singaporean way of multiculturalism: the Politics of the Visible

To be ...means... to inherit.

Jacques Derrida

Returning to Singapore after an absence of several years, I was struck by the uncanniness of Singapore's spatial and identity constructions – of being simultaneously Asian and Western. As Ien Ang and Jon Stratton (1995) have remarked, Singapore constitutes an ambivalence – straddling both East and West, neither fully and 'authentically' Asian nor fully Western. Singapore is neither fully non-Western but it is at the same time, always already Westernized. It is a product of its colonial past. This discursive positioning of Singapore exemplifies the ambivalence of Singapore and possibly, the ambivalence of most Singaporeans, a positioning that disrupts the neatly installed binaries of East and West. Singapore, in short, as Ien Ang and Jon Stratton (1995) have already indicated, 'is a contradiction in terms' (1995: 68). It is catachrestic.[2] It exists in-between the seams of the present and the past. Singapore owes its existence as a modern administrative unit to the inheritance of regulative political signifiers and concept-metaphors such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and multiculturalism, which are again recoded and translated in the political claims in the decolonized space of Singapore – they are coded within the legacy of imperialism and re-constellated. In postcolonial, post-independence Singapore, '[in] the rupture of negotiated independence or national liberation, racialization and ethnicization' (Spivak, 1992: 57), the practice of colonial racial enframements do continue albeit in a different re-constituted form. As Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng-Huat (1998) explains it, denied the myths of shared indigenous ethnic origins or traditions, denied any substantive evidence of any pre-colonial past and denied the story of anti-colonial, revolutionary struggle that typifies other postcolonial nations' founding narratives, the Singaporean postcolonial government 'sought and found an alternative "reason" and source of legitimation'

---

[2] As Gayatri Spivak explains, the paradoxical situation encountered by postcolonial subject is that she has to inhabit cultural, ideological and conceptual landscapes 'palimpsestuously encoded' by the legacies of colonization. These legacies underpin the institutions and structures that formed the condition of decolonization and this paradoxical situation is described by Spivak as catachrestic – a space that the postcolonial subject does not want to, but has no other option than to inhabit. As she indicates, catachreses 'makes postcoloniality a deconstructive case [...] Claiming catachreses from a space that one cannot want to inhabit and yet must criticize is, then, the deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial' (Spivak, 1990: 225; 228).

(Chua, 1998: 30) which would unify postcolonial Singaporeans and thus achieve a Singaporean identity. Thus, in the inability to "adopt the more common assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture'" (Wee, 1995: 143), for the PAP (People's Action Party), the ruling governing party of postcolonial Singapore, the source of this postcolonial identity, that of the feeling of 'oneness' and 'common experience' is the practice of multiculturalism. Although a legacy of British colonial divide-and-rule policies, this multiculturalism would be marshaled in an attempt to interpellate the diverse local racial and ethnic groups into a shared 'Singaporean' identity. Indeed, the Singaporean way of multiculturalism is aimed not only at creating inter-racial harmony but also at producing a distinctive Singaporean multicultural identity. As Lee Kuan Yew stated on 6 June 1965, at the height of events leading to the separation of Singapore from the Federation of Malaysia, '[W]e are in no hurry [...] And this will be a nation that will survive for hundreds of years as a separate identity in Southeast Asia, a multicultural community – a confluence of four of Asia's major cultures and civilizations, superimposed with a streak of British civilization' (Josey, 1968: 392). But this marshalling of difference is also an attempt to diffuse and contain difference.

In Chapter 2, I suggested that underpinning colonial Singaporean photographic practices and travel narratives are visibility politics. Lurking within this politics is a political disposition that could be described as a metaphysical sovereign politics. In this section, I discuss very broadly the postcolonial Singaporean way of multiculturalism. I suggest that postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism exemplifies another moment of visibility politics which demonstrates a political disposition that eradicates alterity by managing alterity, another way denying of difference. This section sets the staging for the next section where I discuss TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* which I suggest offers another form of politics – a struggle for and on behalf of alterity and not the struggle to efface alterity. *Desdemona* offers, in contrast to the official encoding of the multicultural community, another way of thinking community, namely that of the in-operative community.

As intimated, within the context of Singapore, the colonial practices of racial policies during the colonial era are witnessed in the perpetuation and re-constellation of British colonial divide-and-rule practices in present day decolonized postcolonial Singapore. The legacy of Western colonialism is woven into the fabric of the

postcolonial Singapore population and its legacy is witnessed in the predominantly immigrant population: 'Western colonialism is inscribed in the very composition of its predominantly immigrant population' (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 74). Instead of disavowing it, the imperial past is valorized officially by the present elite particularly as it facilitates the present-day technocratic management of difference. For the PAP, the ruling party of Singapore, the inheritance of the imperial past is not debasing as it laid the foundations of present-day Singapore's economic success as a commercial centre and its socio-political developments: 'The story of Singapore as a commercial centre began with its founding in 1819. It grew increasingly important from the 1860s with the coming of the steamship and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Singapore became the entrepot centre of the region, a role enhanced by the development of the tin and rubber industries in the states of the Malay Peninsula' (Ministry of Culture, 1984: 22). For Lee Kuan Yew as well, the postcolonial 'father' and the Prime Minister of Singapore, the colonial origins of Singapore are also the conditions of possibility for present-day Singapore be-coming. In a speech given to the United Kingdom Manufacturers Association and Confederation of British Industries in Singapore on 7 February 1967, Lee Kuan Yew argues that Stamford Raffles, the colonial 'founder' and 'father' of Singapore, made possible both his family's and Singapore's success: '[My] great grandfather came here with nothing [...] My tragedy started when he left his son behind [after returning to China] who was my grandfather; and here I am. I inherited what you [in the process of decolonization] have left me. In a way, it was not all created by you because my great grandfather did play a subsidiary role and so did my father and so did I myself. So we have left [the statue of] Stamford Raffles standing on his pinnacle outside the Victoria Memorial Hall. But for him, Singapore would still be a mudflat' (Josey, 1968: 538).

Designated as an entrepot trade route during the colonial era, Singapore's colonial legacy has left it with an ethnically diverse immigrant population. Modern postcolonial Singapore is, as indicated, an inheritance of colonial diaspora: '[T]hus, the place is a thoroughly hybrid construct' as Ang and Stratton (1995) have indicated and moreover, 'it is precisely this reality of hybridity, with its related dynamics of cultural impurity, mixture, and fusion, which presents a problem in the dominant global cultural order' (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 71).The legacy of racial classifications,

developed and instituted in British colonial practices of racial enframements and imposed on the colonized peoples of Singapore, are now re-constellated in the multicultural policies of present-day Singapore. As Kahn (1998) explains, 'the taken-for-granted ethno-racial categories "Chinese", "Indian" and "Malay" – categories to which the vast majority of Singaporean unquestioningly assign themselves – are in a very real sense arbitrary, having acquired their contemporary parameters not largely from objective cultural markers, but from the advice given to colonial census-takers by British scholars and orientalists during the colonial period' (Kahn, 1998: 17). For example, the legacy of these racial categories is re-constellated on the identity cards of every postcolonial Singaporean, as well as in the national census forms and in government reports in which every Singaporean has to identify with the signifier of a 'racial category'. 'Race' in postcolonial Singapore is signified by the officially sanctioned and delimited by the CMIO categorizations (Chinese-Malay-Indian-Other). These categories are cathected intensively in official policies and national events that aim to construct a quintessentially multiracial Singapore. The designated 'Other' in this instance of the CMIO categorization is the hybrid product and legacy of Western colonialism in Singapore – the 'Eurasian'.[3] Western colonialism, in short, is constitutive in the ontology of present day postcolonial Singapore. The regulative ideal of postcolonial Singapore's multicultural policy, in short, is a reconstellation of the system of ethnic groupings developed in colonial Singapore. Similarly, PuruShotam (1998), for example, also writes how the British orientalist classificatory system of dividing an extremely diverse colonial immigrant population into four essentialist 'racial' groups prefigures the CMIO classificatory schema of postcolonial Singapore. She, PuruShotam (1998), like the other Singaporean critics mentioned here, also suggests that this CMIO classificatory system is an inheritance of the British colonial system of racial classifications. Likewise, she suggests that

[3] For example, in the 1994 National Day Parade, effigies and pictorial representations of CMIO racial categories further emphasized the reduction of diverse ethnicities into four essentialist 'racial' categories in Singapore. These pictorial representations and effigies utilized standard stereotypical gestures. For example, the Chinese peoples were represented in yellow-ochre skin tones with the woman wearing a *cheongsam* and the man with a black skull cap and pigtail. The Malays were depicted in warm brown skin tones wearing a *baju kurong*, the Indians were given a darker chocolate brown and the woman invariably wore a *sari* and the man a Sikh turban. The 'Other', meanwhile, was shades pinker and lighter than the Chinese and dressed in a formal Western dress. These essentialising gestures and markers are noteworthy as most Singaporeans are attired in the latest Western fashions. Most Chinese women do not wear the *cheongsam* on a daily basis. Most Indian men do not wear the turban unless they are Sikh practitioners and indeed in Singapore it is highly unlikely these days to see a Chinese man with a pigtail and black skullcap.

'orientalism as a colonial system of ongoing meanings still exists, albeit in new forms; and more significantly, in our work, so placing us in what might be perceived as neo-orientalism in our daily lives. For these four names are actually rooted in our colonial past. Its application by the present elite, its acceptance by most people at this time, involve us in some, even if unlimited, way to consenting to a new-oriental rule of sorts' (PuruShotam, 1998: 54).[4]

As noted, postcolonial Singapore's official presentation of itself as a multicultural postcolonial space is dependent on this construction of a multicultural identity. In its search for a sovereign postcolonial self-representation, Singapore could neither lay claim to a nativism determined by the topos of a native soil nor could it lay claim to the traumatic ruptures of colonial wars of independence in its 'birth' to a postcolonial decolonized space. Instead, the nativism to which is laid claim to in postcolonial Singapore is the celebration of the native diasporic origins of its disparate and diverse ethnic groups. The hybrid diasporic colonial origins of Singapore is celebrated in its originary claims of a postcolonial decolonized space and highlight once again that as a colonial construct, Singapore is always already Westernized, but neither is it fully and 'authentically' Western nor is it 'authentically' Asian – it is an ambivalence.

Thus, in the absence of 'racial homogeneity' and essentialism tied to 'native soil', the paradoxical ontopologocentric gesture is located instead in the co-option of British colonial racial and ethnic practices which are appropriated, laid claim to and re-politicized by Singaporean official policies as the 'building blocks' for the ontologisation of an integrated multicultural postcolonial Singaporean culture – 'precisely because Singapore's national identity depends on it' (Ang and Stratton, 1995: 76). This paradoxical gesture of onto-spatial constitution highlights how "the

---

[4] Likewise, in everyday face-to-face encounters, most Singaporeans submit to this CMIO classificatory schema and are familiar with being asked the question 'What are you?' This is a fairly standard and common question that arises in daily encounters in Singapore. As PuruShotam (1998) notes, most Singaporeans know that this is a question regarding your place and your inevitable enframement in the CMIO classificatory schema. For example, she gives an example of how she tries to fend off this question by trying a variety of approaches, saying that she is "Singaporean" or revealing that her family is very mixed with Hokkien, Cantonese and Ukrainian strains. Invariably, to quote her: 'I am usually met with laughter and the enjoinder "Aiyah, you know what I mean, lah" [...] Thereafter, I will be subject to a cross-examination that I have yet to develop the skill to fence off. In this, inadvertently, I will refer to roots that reveal that I am also "Indian", but this then translated to, "Oh, that means you are Indian, lah"' (PuruShotam, 1998: 54).

past continue to speak to us. But it no longer addresses us as a simple factual 'past', since our relation to it, like the child's relation to the mother' is always-already after the 'break'"(Hall, 1990: 226). There are however inevitable tensions that arise from these official attempts to socially engineer artificial state sanctioned categories, tensions which are a legacy of colonial stereotypical discourse, remobilized and re-constellated in the discourse of multicultural postcolonial Singapore, tensions 'born of the state's attempt to homogenize highly disparate groupings, [and which] are compounded by the state's intervention to extinguish cultural traits (such as lack of entrepreneurial ambition among the Malays' (Ang and Stratton, 1995aa; 185).[5] In short, ethnicity, identity, subjectivity are the sites of postcolonial political intervention whereby the subjectivity of the lived experience of Singaporean subjects are overdetermined from without, re-circumscribed and re-inscripted again and politicized by the ideological practices of Singapore's official multicultural policies to constitute the One, the self-same 'We'. As Ang and Stratton (1995a) argue, the constitution of a homogenized 'Singaporean Culture' is dependent upon this discursive practice:

> In the Singaporean context, Chineseness, Malayness, and Indianess are constructed as sites of authentic Asianess designed to *invest* the national culture with substance and originary solidity, what in Singaporean discourse is called 'cultural ballast'. [...] 'Singapore's Multiracialism' puts Chinese people under pressure to become more Chinese, Indians more Indian, and Malays more Malay [...] The paradoxical consequence of this is that just as Singaporean national identity is to be an avowedly synthetic construction, so Chineseness, Malayness and Indianess are also becoming synthetic cultural formations in the modern Singaporean context, fabricated rather than 'natural', and designed to represent a 'planned Asian authenticity' produced in order to fit the national order (Ang and Stratton, 1995a: 185-186).

---

[5] Lee Kuan Yew drew on this language of multiculturalism in his attempts to 'integrate' and 'assimilate' the disparate ethnic communities, in which the attempts of postcolonial Singapore to 'build' a multicultural postcolonial space was drawn from this language of 'oneness', 'to build up common attributes, such as one common working language, same loyalties, similar values and attitudes, so as to make the different communities a more cohesive nation' (quoted in Ang and Stratton, 1995: 79).

What is witnessed in postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism is the activity of demarcating and enframing Singaporean identity into visible and knowable identity-positions. The securing of the multicultural 'We' of this form of community is made possible by the paradoxical twin vectors of cultural diversity and cultural similarity (the language of 'oneness'). This language of diversity and oneness forms the bedrock in the postcolonial symbolic unification of the 'We' of the community born from the attendant attempts of homogenizing Singapore's hybridity under the flag of multiculturalism. For example, on 24 August 1966, Lee Kuan Yew introduced a significant Singaporean pledge in an effort to contain and manage, in the PAP's views, the potential antagonism of difference by inaugurating a homogenized 'We'. By laying emphasis on a unified community of the 'We', national culture is invested with substance and 'cultural ballast', made possible by drawing on the language of 'oneness': 'We, the citizens of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people, regardless of race, language or religion, to build a democratic society, based on justice and equality, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity and equality for our nation' (Josey, 1968: 498). In short, the conditions of possibility for the claims of postcolonial Singapore's territorial be-coming and the onto-spatial constitution of the 'We' are enabled by the regulative ideal of multiculturalism, a multiculturalism instituted as a state-sponsored management of difference. The attempt of this paradoxical identitarian enframement is the gesture of the self-affirming and self-protective effort to exclude heterogeneity and the undecidable. Moreover, this programmatic enframement forecloses alterity and the in-coming of the Other. In postcolonial Singapore, we witness an aspect of the politics of the visible which is the desire for legibility and intelligibility. Such a visibility politics is manifested in the representative-calculative practices witnessed in the elite production of an enframed, unitary and securable 'We' of the community.

Another example of the visibility politics of multiculturalism, understood here as associated with rational calculability and planning and the totalitarian political disposition lurking in the 'homogenization of all areas of human life into complete uniformity' (Critchley, 1993: 76) is Singapore's official multicultural discourse regarding language policies. In Singapore, it is the highly contested terrain of postcolonial linguistic culture that bears witness to the tensions arising from the elite's attempts to produce a homogenized 'We'. In postcolonial Singapore, the PAP

instituted language policies are inextricably entwined to the official multicultural politics of homogenization in which the different racial groupings are discursively thematised and 'transformed as a relevant social phenomenon in political discourses which rationalize strategies of social administration' (Chua, 1998: 34). While Mandarin, Tamil and Malay are the official languages of postcolonial Singapore, English, a colonial linguistic heritage, remains the official language of government, administration and business and which is further associated with Singapore's insertion into the practices of the global political economy. Nonetheless, the policy of bilingualism is rigorously enforced in the educational policies of multicultural Singapore, and is additionally witnessed in the compulsorily enforced study of the 'mother tongue' as a second language. This enforcement of multicultural policy was meant to cultivate 'Asian values' and the cultural heritage of the respective 'races' while at the same time allowing Singaporeans to become 'Western' by not becoming *overly* Western (almost White but not quite).[6] However, the contradictory outcome of this official educational policy is a multicultural Singaporean identity as a 'planned' construct of what constitutes, and is determined as, an essential and essentialised 'racial' identity. As Ang and Stratton (1995a) duly noted: "One's 'mother tongue' in Singapore is not the language actually spoken with one's mother in childhood, but the language that belongs criterially to the 'race' of which one claims membership, regardless of fluency or usage. Consequently, only three languages have the formal status of Singapore mother tongues, corresponding to the three 'races': they are Malay, Tamil (for the Indians), and Mandarin (for the Chinese). In line with the classificatory logic of multiracialism, all Singaporeans get *assigned* one of these 'mother tongues' [...] which not only articulates and reinforces the ethnic absolutism inscribed in Singapore's multiracialism [...]' (Ang and Stratton, 1995a: 188). In short, the discursive positioning of Singapore's sovereign multicultural identity is dependent on the distillation and essentialisation of three major ethnic and 'racial' groupings. For example, language differences between Indians were initially suppressed by

---

[6] This paradoxical identity-positioning of Singapore and its ambivalence regarding the over 'Westernization' and 'contamination' of Singapore's traditional cultural practices have also been debated by the Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng-Huat (2000) in his discussion of Singaporean consumption practices as an aspect of identity formation. Further, Chua Beng-Huat also argues that it is this discourse of the fear of over Westernization or over-Americanization which informs the discourse of "the supposedly 'Asian' values of Singaporeans that is being thematised in a cultural/moral/political discourse of contestation between Asian and Western values; a discourse that is promoted by the Singaporean state itself' (Chua, 2000a: 187).

privileging Tamil as the 'group' language for Singaporean Indians. But Tamil is predominantly the language of the Southern-Indians and in a response to protests, other Indian languages such as Hindi, Punjabi and Bengali are now officially acceptable as 'mother tongues'. In other words, as a result of the CMIO categorizations, differences in Singapore are thematised and reduced into essentialist categories for the purposes of social administration and the rationalization of government policies and political practices.

Another example of Singaporean multiculturalism-as-a-management-of-difference is the example of the PAP's official launch of the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' in 1979. What was overlooked, or perhaps ignored, in this campaign is that in Singapore, the ethnic Chinese are linguistically heterogeneous – comprising Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Teochew, Hainanese speakers. Less than 1 per cent are actual native Mandarin speakers. Instead, what was witnessed in this officially enforced campaign to 'Speak Mandarin' was the practice of homogenizing an ethnically diverse group in an attempt to 'to impose order on a heterogeneity perceived by the state as threatening because it operates below the level of "race", as it has been officially articulated, in other words, out of sight of the administrative structure of the state. As a result, by promoting Mandarin as a language of the Chinese, Singaporean Chineseness is an engineered construct – portrayed essentialistically as a traditional culture encapsulated in Confucian values and the Mandarin language' (Ang and Stratton, 1995a: 82). For the Singaporean sociologist, Chua Beng-Huat, what this means, in terms of the discursive production of Singaporeans into visible and essentialised identity positions, is that '[A]ll these translate into a generalized regime of social discipline under a centralized rational public administration under the political leadership of a single political party that possesses a high degree of continuity and personnel' (Chua, 2000a: 186). Another consequence of this homogenization of the ethnically diverse Chinese population of Singapore also meant that, as Chua Beng-Huat (2000a) notes, 'Mandarin has become the common language among Chinese, at the cost to cross-generational communication' (Chua, 2000a: 197). However, the emotional appeal of dialects remains high among the older sections of the population and as a result, as Chua (2000a) indicates, '[T]his has resurfaced politically. For example, in the 1991 General Election, an opposition

party member who won the parliamentary seat made his mass rally speeches in the predominant dialect of that particular constituency' (Chua, 2000a: 197).

In the state-generated Singaporean way of multiculturalism, alterity and ambiguity are disavowed in favor of a homogenized, bounded, enframed community whereby the 'definitive national character for Singaporeans [emerges from a homogenization of] differences among the population [unifying] them as a "people" in the collective imaginary' (Chua, 1998: 41). The PAP's essentialist position on multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference as a political management of the uncertainty posed by alterity is also witnessed in the insecurities and anxieties they have with their political neighbors. While multiculturalism forms the bedrock of Singapore's official narratives and self-presentation, the construction of the Singaporean 'We' also forms the basis of securing and 'maintaining social stability and public security [...] reinforced by constant comparisons with the "decadence", "chaos" and "irrationalities" that apparently surround this island of "rational planning". These comparisons are repeated in the speeches of national leaders, circulated widely by the national media, and in the popular sphere, [...] it is with these comparisons that a "Singaporean" differentiates himself/herself from Others [...] Identity being unavoidably a relational concept, it is via these comparisons that a sense of being Singaporean, a Singaporean identity, is constructed' (Chua, 1998: 42-43). From the above, we see how the constitution of the 'We' in the discursive practices of Singaporean multiculturalism is paradoxically the aporia of the discourse of multiculturalism where the constitution of the 'We' is entwined in the constitution of a community as self-identical, as self-coinciding (the twin vectors of cultural diversity and yet homogeneity) and as self-contained. Consequently, in the Singaporean multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference, what is witnessed in this constitution of the multicultural 'We' is the subsequent walls of defenses that are thrown up against the Other of community. In other words, every definition and enframement of a 'We' is by implication an act of inclusive exclusion in which the constitution of a 'We' is also based on the demarcation of a frontier and by implication a constitution of a 'them', an Other.

As Bhabha has forcefully argued, 'multiculturalism represent[s] an attempt both to respond to and to control the dynamic process of the articulation of cultural

difference, administering a consensus based on a norm that propagates cultural diversity' (Bhabha, 1990: 209). The Singaporean way of multiculturalism controls the dynamic and potentially antagonistic processes of difference and alterity. The espousal of multiculturalism demonstrates in this instance the fear of alterity, a fear that is located in the national policies that mobilizes discourses of essentialised 'racial' categories. These discourses not only articulate the fear of 'cultural contamination' and 'hybridization' but they also locate the disavowal of the necessarily provisional, multiple, processual and potentially internally antagonistic nature of identity constitutions. What is thus denied in the dubious production of a community of the homogenized 'We' are the pluralized possibilities of being with Others on the same territory. In short, what is witnessed is the disavowal of identity as translation and process. What is also witnessed in Singapore's discourse of multiculturalism is the visible constitution of 'cultural diversity as a *containment* of cultural difference' (Bhabha, 1990: 208). This desire for the containment of hybridizing subjectivities and cultural difference is witnessed in the official discourses that express the fears of firstly, the over-Westernization of Asian identity-formations and secondly, the disavowal of difference which is expressed in the Singaporean discourse of multiculturalism. Hence, the discursive machinations of a *logos* bent on achieving a consensus and the subsequent emphasis on 'Asian Values' which is also underscored by the disavowal of identity as hybridity and the fear of difference and heterogeneity. Moreover, this disavowal of cultural difference is linked with the reification of 'racial' boundaries subsumed under the regulative political ideal of the CMIO classifications inherent to the discourse of Singaporean multiculturalism which is, to reiterate, related to the attempts to homogenize and erase difference. Implied in this homogenization and containment of alterity into complete uniformity is that of a totalitarian political disposition within which lurks the attempt of rational calculability and technocratic planning aimed at rational cognition and the affirmation of unconditioned certainty.

Counterposed to this official securing of community, the next section discusses TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* performance-as-critique of this form of politics, a multicultural politics expressed as a homogenization and containment of difference. In *Desdemona* I suggest we can begin to grasp how the alternate politics played out in *Desdemona*'s interculturalism exemplifies a performance-as-critique of the

dominant state-sponsored attempt to construct a multicultural community. As was noted, such a community-securing practice, implicit to Singapore's multiculturalism, is also a containment of difference which is an administration of the politics of the visible is linked to the attempt to build a consensus by a simultaneous disavowal of difference and the pluralized possibilities of being. This creation of a cohesive unified social space is dependent on the division and organization of social, 'racial' groups into organized and intelligible 'racial' containers. In short, as an exemplification of the politics of the visible, Singapore's practice of multiculturalism is an organization and division of peoples into visibly defined groupings within a panoptic field of vision. This production of a social space and community as transparent and knowable is also a construction of the social world as a transparent lucid territory laid out before the panoptic sovereign gaze of knowledge for the state-management of difference. Following Bhabha's remarks on multiculturalism, this regulatory space that is opened up by the visibility practice of Singapore's multiculturalism becomes a space which presumes a universality of a lucid representation of community. As a form of community-securing practice, this formation of a social space cannot acknowledge *difference* in the sense of incommensurability and the enactment of the undecidable. It has to be noted that, in Singapore's case, such a space can only structure cultural diversity in terms of segregation, with each cultural group placed decisively in its place, securely demarcated and defended.

TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* and the question of community

In his discussion of hermeneutics, Kearney (1998) notes that the 'bottom line of all hermeneutics – cold or hot, deconstructive or existential – is that language is a process where *someone says something to someone about something*' (Kearney, 1998: 189). Similarly, the representational spaces of dramatic performances could generally also be said to be composed primarily of characters speaking addressing each other on stage, generally consisting of *someone saying something to someone about something.* Additionally, it could be argued that dramatic performances generally consist of a staging of characters in a bounded representational space holding a dialogue with one another, enacting a debate in which, in the dramatic thrust of the play or performance, some issue or problem is debated and perhaps resolved. Moreover, in broader terms, dialogue and conversation could be said to

underpin a 'community' of the 'We' where *someone saying something to someone about something* is also about the Self attempting to relate to and approach the difference of the Other.

But what happens when this desire for dialogue and mutual comprehension between the Self and Other is held in tension and abeyance? What happens when in the representational space of a given performance, performers speak and act in different tongues and performance traditions? What then is the ethic played out in this type of performance, when everyone is an Other? In an intercultural performance such as TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, which this chapter will focus on, the questions that *Desdemona* raises are: what happens when 'We' or 'I' do not comprehend the Other's language? You speak to me in a language I do not understand. You come to me from a place of otherness and alterity. I do not comprehend you or the difference you embody. Yet I want to. I stumble and fall in my desire to approach some comprehension of you, the Other. How do I relate to and affirm your Otherness? And, if I am to heed to the lessons learnt from Derrida, how can I know you while avoiding the temptations of wanting to reduce you, the Other to my Same? Is it even possible that I will ever know you? I don't know. Yet, I want to. But when I attempt to relate to you, will you understand me? Am I even comprehensible to you, 'my' Other? Would not this mutual incomprehensibility and the impossibility of sharing a dialogue also put into question the community of the 'We'? Would not this otherness inject a fear and trembling into the I Am Who I Am? Whereupon the 'I' becomes an I Who May Be? Do these difficulties suggest that this attempt (of the trying to *say something to someone about something*) could also be seen as a staging and a putting into play the tensions of the ethical relationship between the Self and the difference embodied by the Other? For the purposes of the chapter, I will suggest that intercultural performances such as *Desdemona* is an example where we witness this staging and a 'thinking aloud' of questions which arise when we attempt to stage a 'conversation' or open a relation with the non-relationality of the Other's otherness. It is a staging moreover of a poetics which I discuss in the section following this.

In this section, I will first give the broad parameters of TheatreWorks' performance of *Desdemona*. Next, I will suggest how *Desdemona*'s interculturalism speaks of an ethics of alterity that is compelled by raising the question of community. It is a

question however that does not attempt a closure to that question. In raising the question of community of the 'We', I suggest that *Desdemona* exemplifies the in-operative community. Moreover, by suggesting that *Desdemona* speaks of an ethics of alterity, I also suggest that this performance engages with the radical relation to the radical non-relational of poetics.

While I suggest that *Desdemona* could be read as a counter-narrative to the official Singaporean way of multiculturalism and thus embody a different relationship to Otherness and the Other, I am not suggesting that my reading of *Desdemona* as performing a critique and resistance to the official Singaporean way of multiculturalism is the only true way to read and interpret *Desdemona*. Nor would I suggest that this particular reading goes behind the 'frame' as it were to posit the a meaningful and 'truthful' reading that is in accordance with the intentionality of TheatreWorks director Ong Keng Sen's production of *Desdemona*. Therefore, to re-iterate, I want to emphasize here that this one example of a counter-narrative does not offer up an assertion of another 'truth' in order to overcome other previous 'distortions' of other interpretations. Rather, this chapter works on the wager that *Desdemona*'s interculturalism could be read against and counterposed with that other dominant political securing of Singaporean community, namely multiculturalism. In contrast to the centrality of essentialist notions of identitarian politics in the Singaporean way of multiculturalism, *Desdemona*, I suggest, represents one moment in a critique of the elite attempts to secure the community of the multicultural 'We'. But I am also adamantly not suggesting that my critique of Singaporean multiculturalism represents a critique of heterogeneity with the accompanying call for a return to an ethnically homogenous civic space. Indeed, I am also not suggesting that *Desdemona*'s interculturalism prescribes another way to secure and transcend to another community of the 'We'. Instead, I suggest that *Desdemona* represents a non-closure to the question of community. As a performance of the community as *process*, *Desdemona* represents one moment of posing the question of community of the 'We' and the related theme regarding the question of 'our' relationship to difference and alterity. In Singapore, drama and performance art, more than any other art forms are one of the crucial and potent representational spaces where Singaporeans contest, debate and reflect on issues of identity, history and community and ideas of belongingness. Increasingly, the

representational spaces of performance art in Singapore are also the spaces where political debates and issues are raised, the spaces where official politics are contested and debated. So, what am I suggesting in this chapter's reading of *Desdemona*? To reiterate, supposed by the agonistic representational space of *Desdemona* is a particular moment of questioning the securing of the community of the 'We'. But such a critique is also a 'struggle for – or on behalf of – alterity, and not a struggle to efface, erase, or eradicate alterity' (Campbell, 1998: 191). I want to suggest that what *Desdemona* allows is this re-thinking of politics. A politics of resistance against 'ontological totalitarianism' which is a thinking circumscribed and limited by totality and a totalitarian political disposition. Instead, guided by the poetics of *Desdemona*'s apophatic boldness is that of ethical subjectivity and critical ontology, and which is correlated to the broader political stakes, namely the 'decision to resist domination, exploitation, oppression, and all other conditions that seek to contain or eliminate alterity' (Campbell, 1998: 192). In Chapter 4, I examine the political implication of this ethical alterity in greater detail particularly in terms of an eschatological desire introduced by an encounter with radical alterity.

In looking at *Desdemona* and hence, at the intercultural practices of TheatreWorks, I suggest that the intercultural practices of TheatreWorks question official representational practices that submit themselves to an identity politics and processes of differentiation and the *technicity* of enframements upon which a multicultural community is founded and which recall a return to a metaphysical politics of visibility. Suggested by *Desdemona*'s performance-as-critique is that the Singaporean way of multiculturalism is yet another form of containing heterogeneity even as it embodies a national securing of diverse racial groups on the same territory in the name of national security. Guided by a visibility politics, such a securing of the community of the multicultural 'We' is necessarily opposed to those who are different. As David Campbell indicates in his discussion of multiculturalism, '[U]nlike racism, it [multiculturalism] organizes peoples not hierarchically, but segregates them spatially, with each culture in its place, everyone with their own right to difference securely demarcated and defended' (Campbell, 1998: 167).

TheatreWorks is an international performance company established in 1986 and based in Singapore. Under the directorship of Ong Keng Sen, the concerns of

TheatreWorks move beyond that of Singapore itself. One of their continual concerns is the issue of interculturalism – the key themes of which are often reinvention, juxtaposition, the cultural negotiation with difference and identity as process. And more often than not, their performance projects foreground and interrogate questions of hybridity while embracing at the same time, multiple identities and in doing so, their performances interrogate critical cultural and political issues. Frequently, their intercultural performance projects, for example *Desdemona* and *Lear*, emerge out of collaborations with artists, writers, performers from different cultural, national, regional, ethnic and artistic backgrounds. For example, *The Flying Circus Project* initiated by Ong Keng Sen and established in 1995, is conceived as an on-going experimental large-scale intercultural laboratory which brings together Asian artists, performers (both contemporary and traditional exponents of their chosen art forms), theorists and writers of diverse backgrounds who converge in these laboratories to interrogate questions of identity, culture, location and belonging-ness. Through this so-called 'clash' of cultures in the often varying and dynamic experimental interaction between traditional and contemporary performers, artistes and writers, one of the issues that often surfaces and inevitably predominates in their intercultural performances is the question of cultural difference, cultural negotiation, of cultural and linguistic translation, of the negotiation between borders (both symbolic and imaginary) and the possibilities and the problematic that surface in the attempt to resolve these dichotomies. This crossing of borders, as Dollimore (1991) suggests, 'is not only to traverse, but to mix (as in to cross-breed) and to contradict (as in to cross someone)' (Dollimore, 1992: 288) and this 'crossing' is also suggestive of the possibilities of radicalizing and intervening in hegemonic politics and practices.

However, before proceeding to a discussion of TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, I want to first situate their performance practice within a general discussion of intercultural practice. Apart from Ong Keng Sen, other exponents of intercultural performance include, for example, Eugenio Barba, Peter Brook and Richard Schechner. I want to emphasize here that it is not the goal of this section to delineate in depth the topography of wide-ranging Western and non-Western intercultural practices and its often divergent theories and models. Suffice it to say that while intercultural performances inevitably involve processes of negotiation and encounter with difference both temporally (across history) and spatially (across geographical and

social and cultural categories), intercultural theatre is not without its own problematics. One only has to refer to Pavis' *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (1996) to appreciate the range of approaches encompassed by the term 'interculturalism'. What is foregrounded by Pavis (1996) is that interculturalism is a contested site in both theory and practice, too varied and process-based and that it is too soon to propose a global theory of interculturalism (Pavis, 1996: 1). However, intercultural performance practices do share certain similarities and like the political ideals of multiculturalism, emphasis is often placed on cross-cultural negotiation and the politics of collaboration and exchange, the possibilities of having a dialogue with Otherness and the commitment to pluralism. In an intercultural collaboration and negotiation, there is often less emphasis on preserving the 'purity' and 'authenticity' of the various cultures and performance traditions for exotic display (Pavis, 1996). Often, the intercultural process foregrounds the incommensurability of exchange and the tensions that arise in the desire to maintain a dialogue with alterity and Other(s). While there is often the desire to maintain equitable power relations between participants, the aim is not to produce a harmonious and homogenized performance space. Rather, the goal of intercultural process-based practice is often located in the exploration of the possibilities of cultural exchange and dialogue in all its contradictions and tensions. An example of intercultural performance is Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* which aimed not to relativize differences but rather to interrogate and even celebrate those differences. However, Brook's intercultural experiments have begged the question of the power dynamics inherent in the politics and ethics of celebrating hybridity even as it assimilates and flatten differences. In other words, without an ethical self-reflexivity, intercultural performances do risk the possibilities of an imperialistic relationship to the Other's otherness. In his critique of the ethics underpinning intercultural practice, Daryl Chin (1991) indicates the fragility of the intercultural process, noting its potential to return to an invasive form of neo-imperialism:

> Interculturalism hinges on the questions of autonomy and empowerment. To deploy elements from the symbol system of another culture is a very delicate enterprise. In its crudest terms, the question is: when does that usage act as cultural imperialism? Forcing elements from disparate cultures together doe seem to be a solution that makes sense, aesthetically, ethically, or philosophically. What does that prove: that the

> knowledge of other cultures exists? That information about other cultures is readily available? (Chin, 1991: 94).

Rustom Bharucha (1997), an Indian dramaturge noted for his writings on interculturalism, has for example used the metaphor of the river to describe the process of intercultural interventions and interactions, particularly their potential capacity to move away from binarised dichotomies. Consequently, what is highlighted by the intercultural as a process of cultural exchange and translation are the possibilities of identity and subjectivity to be simultaneously fluid and liminal, a movement away, as I understand it, from the stringency of ontopologocentrism and identitarian politics. Bharucha, has for example, used the metaphor of the river as an archetype to denote the deep resonances that the river has in Indian cultural and belief frameworks. For him, the metaphor of the river in intercultural process-based practice denotes the simultaneous capacity to rejuvenate, to signify cultural convergences and intermingling just as it also denotes the capacity to dissolve Indian ethnic communalism, including its possibility to 'dissolve differences, cutting across class, caste, and community' however provisional those dissolution of differences are (Bharucha, 1997: 31). At the same time, he indicates that these processes of exchange and translation between the Self and Other are highly tentative, politically charged and extremely fragile, often open to the abuses of power relations and identitarian politics, particularly in the flow of capital between the North and South and the East and West. In his theoretical interventions, Bharucha (2000) has, for example, charged TheatreWorks production of *Workhouse Afloat* – an intercultural performance that was meant to highlight the plight of the disparities and injustices of Singapore's 'cheapened' and subalternised immigrant labour force – with ventriloquising their histories 'even as he [Ong Keng Sen] claims the rights to represent their erased histories' (Bharucha, 2000: 43). On this count, Bharucha asserts that the interculturalism of TheatreWorks' *Workhouse Afloat* works to represent the Other even as it 'consumes' the Other (Bharucha, 2000: 44). For Bharucha, while the interculturalism of TheatreWorks' *Workhouse Afloat* works as an interrogation of the Singaporean 'economic miracle' while at the same time disavowing any real ethical responsibility of/for the Other(s). The problematic of the interculturalism of *Workhouse Afloat* paradoxically performs at the same time a 'self-congratulation', 'in so far as it legitimizes the absence of any real respect for the

Other, who can never be regarded on equal terms, but who is – ultimately – fit only to be consumed' (Bharucha, 2000: 44) and to re-affirm the Self. The fragility of interculturalism is the likelihood that it is inevitably subsumed in an ethnocentrism that seeks synthesis rather than respect: 'The problem arises [...] when the preoccupation with the "self" overpowers the representation of "other" cultures [and] when the Other is not another but the projection of one's ego. Then all one has is the glorification of the self and the co-option of other cultures in the name of representation' (Bharucha, 1993: 28). This glorification and engorgement of the sovereign Self via a consumption of the Other is not dissimilar to the metaphysical desire of visibility politics that seeks a proprietorial relationship to the Other. As noted, such a relationship, underpinned by a calculative-representative political disposition is also compelled by a hostile way of being with the otherness of the Other and founded on a totalitarian political disposition enacted in a desire to erase doubt caused by heterogeneity.

I suggest that an example of an intercultural performance that takes a non-proprietorial relationship to the Other and which moves away from metaphysical visibility politics is *Desdemona*. *Desdemona*, a TheatreWorks production, was conceived and directed by Singaporean based Ong Keng Sen in collaboration with the Japanese feminist playwright Rio Kishida. The process-based performance of *Desdemona* emerged out of the intercultural experiments and improvisations of *The Flying Circus Project* and received its world premiere at the Telstra Adelaide Festival, 15-18 March, 2000. Ong Keng Sen, writing on the intercultural experimental laboratory of *The Flying Circus Project* indicates that the intercultural laboratories initiated by TheatreWorks have thus far 'brought together 150 artists from India, Korea, China, Tibet, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore in a process that I call "cultural negotiation", with no view to end-product or final presentation' (Ong, 2001: 126).

Such is the interculturalism of *Desdemona* that it is characterized by firstly, a variety of performance styles and traditions with the ten core participating performers and visual artists performing in the idioms of their own performance tradition and cultural styles. Secondly, the artists also perform in their own languages. Notwithstanding the effects of defamiliarisation that accompany the use of different languages and

performance styles, what is also signaled by *Desdemona*'s interculturalism and its varieties of border-crossings is the necessity of engaging in the difficulties of conducting a dialogue with the alterity of the Other. As Ong Keng Sen writes in his Director's Notes (2000), '[T]he different performers in Desdemona will perform in their own languages and cultural styles. Yet they engage in their dialogue with each other, intersecting into a complex theatrical languages' (Ong, 2000: 7).

Very broadly, the salient features of the performance are as follows. In the opening scene of TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, the audience is introduced to Othello asking the question, a question that moreover persists in the agonism of the postcolonial subject who desires to be-come: 'Who am I? What am I?' Othello cries, 'Sometimes I do not know who I am or what I am'. The audience is told that Othello is haunted by the memories of his father who was also the ruler and colonizer of this land. We, the audience are also told that he, Othello, is obsessed with having a son who he will also name Othello. The person who will bear him this son is Desdemona who alongside her people have been colonized and enslaved by Othello's father's father. With colonization, Desdemona and her people were not allowed to have names. Instead, they were given numbers. However, in a highly significant soliloquy, Desdemona sings: 'This country was once free. Before Othello's father's father invaded it, we used to have names. But now, we are only given numbers. I will tell you a secret. My mother gave me a name. My name is Desdemona [...]'. Desdemona has been given a secret name by her mother, namely Desdemona. In her agonal search to embrace her identity and her memory of a past and to challenge her subject position as colonized subject in the present, she sings a song that recalls the memory of her mother and that past which her mother represents. Desdemona, in Ong Keng Sen's postcolonial intercultural translation of the Shakespearean play, also dramatizes the colonial subalternisation of women. She is the abjected outside of the discourse of colonialism and is relegated to the outside of the frame of that discourse. But like Othello, Desdemona is also searching for an identity that is not circumscribed by and which at the same time transcends the inscription of identity imposed on her by the processes of colonization, and in her song, she remembers that name which is given to her by her mother. Othello however spies on her singing and in a fit of jealous rage, on account that she not only attempts to struggle against her colonized subject position but also because she

represents all that is female, he kills her. For Othello, Desdemona represents all that is monstrously feminine and abjectly other but before he kills her, his final line to her is 'In you I do not exist'. Ong Keng Sen indicates in his Director's Notes (2000), 'As he spies on her, this is the beginning of his fear of Desdemona; she represents mother/memory and all that is female [...] he kills her out of this fear' (Ong, 2000: 5). However, as we have also learnt from Derrida, what is relegated to the outside and entombed as the 'dead' often wields a power. The outside continues to organize the inside of that discursive enframement. Desdemona returns as the spectre to haunt Othello. In the final scene, as the spectre that makes the present-being of Othello waver, she wreaks her revenge by her possession and inhabitation of both Othello and a male slave.[7] By entering and possessing their bodies, both men are somatically transformed by Desdemona into women. In the final scene, as the two men as women kiss, Othello is killed by the poisonous saliva that flows from the male slave (as Desdemona's weapon).

However, in Ong Keng Sen's translation of the Shakespearean play, the racial otherness of Othello is elided. For Lee Weng Choy (2000), a Singaporean based cultural critic, what is foregrounded for him in Ong Keng Sen's *Desdemona* is an Othello who is 'a figure of essentialised patriarchy, an archetype of the colonizer, the oppressor. Desdemona, on the other hand, is an archetype of the slave, the Other' (Lee, 2000).[8] However, although Ong Keng Sen's Othello is very loosely based on the Moorish army general of Shakespeare's play, here Othello is registered in a series of shifts, that of gender shifts and the negotiation and passing between different performance traditions. Othello, in Ong Keng Sen's version, is performed by

---

[7] For Derrida, to be is to be haunted and his understanding of ontology as hauntology represents an oppositional reading of ontology and introduces us to the vicissitudes of ontology. In Derrida's conception of ontology as 'hauntology', the metaphysics of being as self-sufficient, self-certifying and self-coinciding presence is (ultimately) impossible. Rather, as Derrida suggests, spectrality makes presence waver: '[T]o haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concept of being and time. That is what we would be calling hauntology. Ontology opposes it only in a movement of exorcism' (Derrida, 1994: 161). In other words, for Derrida, '[S]pectrality does not involve the conviction that ghosts exist or that the past (and maybe the future they offer to prophesy) is still very much alive and at work, within the living present: all that it says, if it can be thought to speak, is that the living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we could do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional error betray us' (Derrida, 1994: 38-39).

[8] On the issue of the vagaries of translations in the performance of TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*, see Lee Weng Choy's *Othello Gazes: Desdemona and the Unity of Spectacle* (2000).

two Indian performers, one female and the other male: Madhu Margi, an Indian exponent of the highly ritualized *kudiyattum* Sanskrit theatre and Maya Rao, an actress trained in *kathakali.* As Ong Keng Sen states, 'I wanted to move away from earlier interpretations of *Othello*, especially the obsessive stereotyping of black machismo' (Ong, 2001: 126). Instead, what was of primary importance to him was the intercultural process. What is also problematised, for me, by *Desdemona* are the questions provoked by its interculturalism. These are the politics and the ethics underpinning the possibility of relating to the non-relationality of the Other's otherness. *Desdemona*'s interculturalism is suggestive of an ethics of alterity. As Ong Keng Sen writes in his Director's Notes (2000) "'Desdemona' is a dreamscape of discovering the She within the He, of discovering the other within the self, of discovering another culture within one's own culture' (Ong, 2000: 7). Both Madhu Margi and Maya Rao perform in the codified bodily gestural language and the highly ritualized performance style of *kudiyattum* and *kathakali.* Mainly non-verbal in their performance, they do occasionally sing but when they do, they do so primarily in sung Sanskrit. Desdemona is performed by Malaysian-born Singaporean actress, Claire Wong who performs in English. But the dramatic tension between Desdemona and the two Othellos is almost peripheral to the whole performance as a multiplicity of performance traditions and styles inform the staging of *Desdemona.* For example, while Claire Wong's Desdemona is dressed in a simple floor-length contemporary white costume with wide sleeves, very suggestive of traditional Korean costume, Margi and Rao, the two Othellos of the performance, are dressed in the traditional costume styles of the *kudiyattum* and *kathakali* theatrical traditions.

Simultaneous to the dramatic action between Desdemona and the two Othellos, Korean music composed by Korean musicians Jang Jae Hyo and Shin Chang Yool form the musical backdrop of the performance while Javanese dancer Martinus Miroto's performance is interwoven into the performance. At the same time, Burmese U Zaw Min's puppet theatre introduces the metaphor of puppetry, and email installations created on-stage by Singaporean performer and sociologist Low Kee Hong are projected onto screens overhead. These email missives speculate as to whether the performers are mere pawns to Ong Keng Sen's puppet master and author-creator. On these screens, email messages are projected highlighting the questions and the self-reflexive thoughts of the performers and what they think of this

intercultural performance. At one point during the performance, an email message is projected overhead: '[R]emember my last email about some of the potential tensions due to differences in working methodologies amongst the intercultural cast ...well, these competing demands have become more evident. [...] Even though all of us are billed as collaborators, it's like there's still a hierarchy where some are more important that others. Sometimes I wonder if there is a point to intercultural work? Is it a dialogue or is it about how effective the director is at cultural management?' During the performance, apart from the email texts projected overhead, video installations also form the backdrop of the performance onto which Korean, Sanskrit and Japanese scripts are projected. As Ong writes in his Director's Notes (2000): 'Desdemona' is a multiplicity of cultural styles. Myanmar puppets weave into a kathakali actress performing as Othello. In fact, there are two Othellos, the other being a performer from the 1,500 year-old Sanskrit theatre form, *kudiyattum*. All the time characters are interfaced with video images engineered by two visual/installation artists from Singapore and Korea: a percussionist and a highly skilled ajaeng (a zither played with a bow) player from a fusion traditional/pop group [...] The different performers in *Desdemona* will perform in their own language and cultural styles. Yet they engage in their dialogue with each other, intersecting into a complex theatrical languages' (Ong, 2000: 8). As Matthew Ngui, the Singaporean installation artist and performer involved in the intercultural staging of *Desdemona*, notes, not dissimilarly from Ong Keng Sen, the interculturalism of *Desdemona* was consciously one underscored by the desire for an experimental re-imagination of Asian subjectivity. As he notes, the 'pressures [of interculturalism] in turn surround the experiment; colliding molecules carrying divergent skills, belief structures, social positionings, languages, aesthetic senses, identities and sexualities. Homogeneity in every aspect is the anti-thesis in this project' (Ngui, 2000: 9). For Ong Keng Sen and his intercultural company, *Desdemona* is ultimately about *process*. Only in Adelaide and Singapore does *Desdemona* appear as a finished product. In Munich, it reverts to rehearsals on display where the audience watches the performance reconfigure itself as new stimuli and questions are introduced. In Fukuoka, it becomes an installation in a gallery where the performers are live exhibits in an endless work-shopping of an ever mutating performance.

Critical responses to TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* have been varied, veering from praise to incomprehension and to anger.[9] However, a constant criticism of *Desdemona* is that of its 'chaotic' indecipherability – of incomprehensibility and unreadability.[10] Asked by Helena Grehan as to what it was 'about', Ong Keng Sen's response to Grehan was: 'I am afraid Desdemona was never meant to be an easy read' (Grehan, 2001: 113). In yet another reply to his other critics, he moreover stated, "I often find such questions rather difficult to answer. How can I express in a sentence, a paragraph, the meaning of a performance? [...] Finally I said that 'Desdemona' is a study of culture, hopefully a journey which is neither didactic nor academic. It is about a group of Asian artists looking at ourselves and rethinking the way in which Asia has been represented on the stage in the past [...] Ultimately, this is what is appealing about an intercultural venture. All of us will never have a consensus about the "whats", the "whys" and the "hows" [...]" (Ong, 2000: 6). Ironically, for Ong Keng Sen, it was in Singapore where critical responses have veered between anger and bewilderment. He writes, '[I]ronically, multiracial and multilingual Singapore was befuddled by the various Asian languages in the piece, ranging from a highly sophisticated codified gestural language to Sanskrit to the contemporary visual arts language' (Ong, 2001: 129-130). Indeed, I am in sympathy with Ong Keng Sen when he notes in an interview with Clarissa Oon in the *Singapore Straits Times*, '[T]he overall vision in this country is so involved in product, in efficiency, that I feel it is important for me as an artist to produce process rather than product [...] At this moment, Shakespeare is just the launch pad – in this political action of rethinking how Asia is to be represented' (Oon, 2000: 4). However, this desire for decipherability is also equivalent and transferable to our political desire for ready-made readability, for visibility and hence, perceptual certitude. Indeed, what would be the political disposition lurking within our desire to approach and appraise the radical non-relationality of the Other? After all, would it not be perverse to insist on visibility and knowability from the Other? By insisting on visibility from the Other, are we not complicit with the metaphysical proprietorial politics of the visible? Is not this presumption related to the metaphysical violence of transubstantiating the Other into the Same? Perhaps the productiveness of *Desdemona*'s indecipherability could

---

[9] See for example, Nayar (2000), Dolven (2000) and *Desdemona's Hamburg Reviews* (2000) courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

[10] See for instance, Helena Grehan (2001).

be said to serve a political function especially if by evading this desire for readability, what is also resisted is the desire for an organized discourse that attempts to pre-determine a political product that is univocal and definitive of who 'We' are.

It is this provocation of the question of the 'We' of the multicultural community that lies at the heart, I suggest, of *Desdemona*'s interculturalism. Apart from its more explicit narrative of the intrinsic chiasmic intertwinement between the colonizer and the colonized in colonial power relations, Ong Keng Sen also indicates, in his Director's Notes (2000), another important feature of this intercultural production. Desdemona, in her loneliness, states that she desires to have a conversation with Othello. This desire to have a conversation also moves us from the dominant narrative between Desdemona and Othello and introduces us to the question of the 'We' of the community. For Ong Keng Sen and *Desdemona*'s company of ten performers who perform in different languages and performance traditions, this question of wanting to have a conversation is also a recurring one in their intercultural workshops and performances. It is a question that also signals the broader political concerns of the intercultural process, which is the desire to have a conversation with the racial and gendered Other, a desire to affirm alterity and heterogeneity. In the moment of wanting to relate to the alterity of the Other, all seeming knowability ends. The Other announces the limits and puts into question the identification of the 'I' and the 'We'. Such are the inevitable incommensurabilities rising out of the intercultural process that, for Ong Keng Sen and his intercultural company, one of the questions that are often foregrounded in these intercultural performances and workshops is the 'desire to have a conversation as a company of individual artists from different cultures' (Ong, 2000: 6). At one point in the performance, Desdemona speaks for everyone when she says 'You don't speak my language and I don't speak your language'. Recall the earlier question posed at the beginning of this section. If dialogue and conversation could be said to underpin a 'community' of the 'We' where *someone saying something to someone about something* also underpins the question regarding the possibility of the Self relating to and approaching the Other(s), what happens when this issue of dialogue and mutual comprehension between the Self and Other of a 'community' is held in tension and abeyance? What happens when in the representational space of a given performance, performers speak and act in different tongues and performance

traditions? What then is the ethic played out in this type of performance, when everyone becomes an Other? As Ong Keng Sen also writes, 'Desdemona's imagination becomes the vehicle through which they (the company) reveal their frustrations in communicating, and the attempts to find a common ground for dialogue – the dilemmas of the intercultural enterprise' (Ong, 2001: 128). As he states in an interview with Clarissa Oon (2000), the broader intention underlying the intercultural *Desdemona* was about 'reviewing the process of coming together as an inter-cultural group' (Oon, 2000: 4). This desire to have a conversation is also transferable to the wider political implications which name the desire to have a conversation with the different Other of the community which is, for Derrida, also circumscribed by a desire to be ethically responsible and responsive to the alterity of the Other's otherness. Likewise, for me, as a postcolonial subject who inhabits the decolonized multicultural space of Singapore, Ong Keng Sen's question about the possibility of having a conversation with the Other is also undoubtedly significant: 'Can we have a conversation when we have different histories, different memories and different languages?' (Ong, 2000: 6). *Desdemona* thus becomes the crucible that performs the agonal question of postcolonial subjectivity that is compelled by a desire to think the otherwise, disposed to a desire to fashion alternate possibilities of being with the Other. In addition, *Desdemona*'s interculturalism also provokes the question of the 'We' of the multicultural community. As performed by *Desdemona*, such is the agonism of TheatreWorks' intercultural representational spaces that it is also underscored by the desire and the dilemmas of finding a way to relate to the Other of the community, an Other who inhabits a position of alterity. In Chapter 4, I address this problematic question by considering the wider political implications, in terms of the politics of the invisible, of how we approach challenge of relating to the alterity of the Other without transubstantiating the Other into the Same.

As noted, as an intercultural process-based performance, *Desdemona* mobilizes and complicates questions of essentialism and notions of cultural and ethnic authenticity; particularly the question of what constitutes the essential truth about identity (racial, gender and ethnic) and subjectivity. The questions posed by the interculturalism of *Desdemona*, I would suggest, revolve round interrogating the dangers posed by the essentialisms underpinning ontopologocentrism, that is to say, the rooting of identity (racial and ethnic) and hence, the linking of the ontological value of present-being to

a territory. Consequently, as an act of inclusive exclusive enframement, ontopologocentrism displays 'an axiomatics linking indissociably the ontological value of present-being [on] to its situation, to the stable and presentable determination of a locality, the topos of territory, native soil, city, body in general' (Derrida, 1994: 82). As indicated in the preceding section, the ontopologocentric gesture of Singaporean multiculturalism relates to the constitution of a visible and hence, knowable 'We'. This constitution of the lucid and homogenous 'We' is also linked to the constitution of the One of this community. But lurking within this constitution of the 'We' of this community is that of a violent signification where, in the constitution of a self-coinciding, self-identical One, self-protective walls are thrown up to guard itself against the constitutive outside of the Other. Drawing and defining the border of the 'We' of the community thus enables us to identify and articulate who 'We' are thereby allowing 'us' to identify who 'they' are. In *Aporias*, Derrida notes the function of these divisions and the consequent threat to identity that follows the crossing of (symbolic and imaginary) borders: '[A]n indivisible line. And one always assumes the institution of such indivisibility. Customs, police, visa or passport, passenger identification – all of that is established upon the institution of the indivisible, the institution therefore of the step that is related to it, whether the step crosses or not, consequently, where the figure of the step is refused to intuition, where the identity or indivisibility of a line [...] is compromised, the identity to oneself and therefore the possible identification of an intangible edge – the crossing of the line – becomes a problem. There is a problem as soon as the edge-line is threatened. And it is threatened by its first tracing' (Derrida, 1993: 11).

As noted in the last section's discussion about the Singaporean way of multiculturalism, the desire for clearly secured and visibly demarcated boundaries is witnessed in the disavowal of alterity and heterogeneity. The multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference witnessed in the elite discursive practices of Singapore's multiculturalism locates this disavowal of thinking otherwise and the fear of a possible community as containing the capacity to be otherwise, to have the potentiality for self-divergence and non-coincidence. The metaphysical visibility politics underpinning Singapore's official multicultural discourse is located in the attempts to institute a programmatic decision to locate and contain difference, emplacing it instead as 'cultural diversity' which is, at the same time, also a

foreclosure of the possibilities of a dialogue with the Other. In other words, the constitution of the 'We' and the One of this community is also at the same time, the conditions of impossibility of the full realization of this self-same, self-identical community. This constitution of a homogenous 'We' and the subsequent dismissal of difference and alterity gestures to its impossibility of constituting the 'We' as self-coincidence, where the condition of possibility in the constitution of the 'We' is only made available by the homogenization and the containment of differences, by which "the national state [masters] social time 'by means of a single homogenous measure, which only reduces the multiple temporalities [...] by encoding differences between them"' (Bhabha, 2000: 57). Central to this constitution of the 'We' is that in order to symbolize and self-actualize, something will be excluded from that order, the condition of possibility by which that constitution of the sovereign 'We' is to function properly. The gesture of this self-protective enclosure of the 'We', by which the constitution of a self-coinciding 'community' is made possible and plausible, is the very opposite to the community that Derrida has argued for:

> I don't much like the word community, I am not even sure I like the thing. If by community one implies, as is often the case, a harmonious group, consensus, and fundamental agreement beneath the phenomena of discord and war, then I don't believe in it very much and I sense in it as much threat as promise. There is doubtless this irrepressible desire for a "community" to form but also for it to know its limit – and for its limit to be its *opening* (Derrida, 1995: 355)

What Derrida seeks, in other words, is a community as a space of non-closure, as a possibility and potentiality of being opened up to divergence and non-coincidence (Merleau-Ponty's *ecart*). Moreover, in this pursuit of a possible impossible community what is also localized is the desire for identity to be non-identical to itself, to differ and defer from itself. This form of community is to be distinguished from those community-securing practices where the 'We' is constituted as self-identical, self-coinciding, homogenous and impermeable: 'what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself [...] different *with* itself' (Derrida, 1992b: 9).

To explain a little: I do not think that this means that Derrida rejects community. Rather, like Jean-Luc Nancy (1996) in his discussion of the 'inoperative community', Derrida recognizes while, doubtlessly, community-building exercises have many

positive aspects, the word 'community' is not without its difficulties. The power relations and the metaphysical coordinates that underline practices that enframe a community also speaks of the bestowal of a proper name and, for Derrida, the bestowal of a proper name which no social order can avoid also implies a system of classification and identification by which a group or a people recognize one another. As Derrida indicates, this power to name carries a violence, which is the violence of identity constitution that follows when a community attempts to present itself as a self-contained unity of being: 'the originary violence of language within the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of arche-writing: arche-violence' (Derrida, 1997a: 112). For Nancy (1996), this production of a self-coinciding community also names a hegemonic and metaphysical vision of community that is dependent on a rational and homogeneous sovereign entity that exemplifies the 'will to realize an essence' (Nancy, 1996: xi). For Nancy, the metaphysical politics that produce the myth of a rational community also underscores the essentialist and suspect production of the sovereign subject as 'the absolutely detached for-itself, taken as origin and certainty' (Nancy, 1996: 3). For Nancy, this myth of the hegemonic self-coinciding community is intertwined with the myth of rational and transparent subjects disavowing differences from themselves and, for Nancy; this is nothing less than the will to power.

The potency of *Desdemona*, I want to suggest, lies in the way in which it exemplifies the inoperative community that Nancy speaks of and which constitutes a resistance 'to all forms and all the violences of subjectivity' (Nancy, 1996: 35) as well as all forms of violences in community-securing practices. For Nancy, a radical way of understanding community must be an inoperative one and such a community acknowledges alterity and heterogeneity and 'it is always revealed to others. Community is what takes place always through others and for others' (Nancy, 1996: 15). At the same time, Nancy also highlights how this model of the inoperative community is 'dialogicity itself' (Nancy, 1996: 227). Recall the tensions of communication played out in *Desdemona*'s interculturalism and the questions it provoked in the constitution of the 'We' of the community. As Nancy indicates, in the moment of communication, all seeming knowability disappears. Communication announces the origin of human being but it also announces our limits: 'infinitely

announced, the other puts an end, unceasingly, to the identification and to the assumption of the absolute, perfect understanding' (Nancy, 1996: 246).

In our attempt to relate to alterity and heterogeneity, to find a non-totalizing, non-proprietorial disposition toward the non-relationality of the Other, Nancy also highlights how we are brought to our own limits. In bringing us to our limits, the sovereign metaphysical political disposition of the I Am Who I Am is challenged. We are challenged by the alterity of the Other to move beyond the limit condition. At the same time, in bringing us to our limits, the challenge posed is that of finding a non-totalizing disposition, namely a radical relation with the radical non-relational, opened up by and summoned by the Other. Such a radical relation also challenges us to constantly re-open the question of the 'We' and puts into question our political disposition to radical alterity. By taking us to the limits and excessing the hegemonic vision of community, the in-operative community, for Nancy, is also the space of the political 'at which all politics stops and begins. The communication that takes place on this limit, and that in truth, constitutes it' (Nancy, 1996: 80). In our encounter with the Other of community, 'the other puts an end, unceasingly, to the identification and to the assumption of the absolute, perfect understanding' (Nancy, 1996: 246). Moreover, to look at this in another light, for the subject of community, while there is undoubted value in being discursively recognizable and visible and hence nameable, what this also means is that the subject is also vulnerable to knowledge and to being produced through dominant discourses. Seen in this light, perhaps there is equal potency in remaining unmarked and untranslatable, in remaining underdefined. As a performance-as-critique of dominant multicultural politics that attempt to enframe the community into a calculable and knowable unit for the purposes of administration, *Desdemona*'s interculturalism performs the inoperative community that is in 'excess', it excesses those community-securing practices in terms of signification and representation, interrupting instead in this myth-making of the visible, knowable and homogeneous community. This model of community, as performed by *Desdemona*, is no longer dependent on the fossilization and pre-determinations of identity, of what constitutes the 'I' and the 'We' of the community. Rather, recall Ong Keng Sen's earlier reply to his critics where he suggests that his experimental intercultural performance projects could be better thought of as *process* rather than the production of a univocal political product. And what is re-worked by *Desdemona*'s

performance-as-critique, in terms of the politics of resistance, is the dominant and official Singaporean conception of community, of what constitutes the 'I' and the 'We' of the community. What is re-worked and re-thought in *Desdemona*'s intercultural performance is the idea of the community as work and *process* and in doing so, what is resisted is 'everything that would bring about its completion' (Nancy, 1996: 81). For Jean-Luc Nancy (1996), the in-operative community also speaks of a desire for the Other, a desire for the future community to come which is perpetually renewed and perpetually deferred: '[C]ommunity without community is *to come*, in the sense that it is always *coming*, endlessly, at the heart of every collectivity (because it never stops coming, it ceaselessly resists collectivity itself as much as it resists the individual). It is no more than this: to come to the limit of compearance, to the limit to that which we are convoked, called, and sent – and whence we are convoked, called and sent' (Nancy, 1996: 71).

To sum, I suggest that the intercultural performance of *Desdemona* complicates and interrogates the axiomatics of ontopologocentric gestures such as authenticity, nativism and essentialisms that attempt to fix identity and subjectivity to a topos or 'native soil'. What is localized instead and foregrounded in *Desdemona* is the question of identity as translation and process. In addition, I suggest that *Desdemona*'s process-based interculturalism is posed as a critique of the official practices of multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference and introduces us to the community of the question. *Desdemona*'s performance of the in-operative community poses the question of the community of the 'We'. Arguably, *Desdemona* in-operative community constitutes a playful challenge to the metaphysical visibility politics which is manifested in this instance as a desire for fixed ontologisations and onto-spatial constitutions. Because the intercultural process of *Desdemona* stresses open-endedness and indeterminacy, it is suggestive of a broader political refusal to be delimited and reduced to stringent onto-spatial-constitutions, namely the refusal to be fixed and immobilized within racial, gender and historical "categories" and boundedness. Thus, I suggest that as a representational space, *Desdemona* offers a different figuration of politics. This re-imagination is one which pursues the struggle for and on behalf of alterity. Moreover, as a performance-as-critique of the Singaporean way of multiculturalism, *Desdemona*'s interculturalism radicalizes multiculturalism and actively nurtures 'antagonism, conflict, plurality and multiplicity,

not at the expense of security or identity but in terms of security's and identity's contamination and indebtedness to its other(s)' (Campbell, 1998: 219). By emphasizing process and the continual encounter with alterity, and the tensions of communication and dialogue that arise in these encounters, *Desdemona* poses a broader challenge which is the question of a radical relation with the radical non-relationality of the Other. This mode of being with the Other, non-proprietorial in nature, is in contrast to the totalitarian political disposition underpinning the onto-theological politics of the visible. As a mode of being-with the Other, this disposition, as I suggest in the next section, is compelled by a poetics, provoked by the desire for a radical relation with the radically non-relational.

Politics of the Invisible: Poetics, Heterotopias

As noted, *Desdemona*'s process-based interculturalism interrogates the questions of cultural negotiation and convergence, of raising the question of subjectivity and the question of the 'We' without necessarily seeking to circumscribe the answer. As a performance, it puts into question the community of the 'We' that is offered by the Singaporean state's practices of defining the multicultural 'We'. In a shared representational space where everyone becomes an Other, where the 'I' and the 'We' are put into question, we are also invited us to enter into an otherness, and to recognize ourselves in it by putting ourselves into question. I suggest that what is allowed to be reworked and rethought in *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community is the possibility of restructuring the space in which politics takes place. This space is not, to reiterate, the territorialized uniformity of a homogeneous community of the 'We' but a space of contingent, mobile connections that move beyond both the constraining positions of dominant elite discourses and of a metaphysical political thinking compelled by an ontological totalitarianism. As process, the inoperative community, like that performed by TheatreWorks' intercultural *Desdemona*, is not directed to an end-point. Instead, it is a never-ending task, an open-ended movement of indeterminacy that is compelled by an apophaticism of poetics, an openness directed towards what is elsewhere, towards that which the eye does not see, the radically non-relational of the invisible. Recall the question I posed earlier in this chapter: what ethic is played out in TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*? The gift that *Desdemona* gives to me is a way of thinking through an

aspect of the politics of the invisible, which is that of poetics. Poetics, as an incommensurability-vision, is a productive act which is beholden towards a radical way of being with the Other and a way of cultivating an otherwise than being. Poiesis, as Richard Kearney (1995) explains, becomes an act of re-figuration and re-imagination and its significance is compelled by a desire for the beyond, 'accorded a sense beyond the immediately graspable and calculable' (Kearney, 1995: xiii).

As a practice of the invisible, the poetics of *Desdemona*'s intercultural practice allows a different figuration of politics by offering a re-figuration of the relation towards alterity: '[P]oetics [...] serves ethics by enabling each of us to be beyond ourself, to be with the other and to come back to ourself as if to another. To imagine the other is to imagine *differently*. It is, in itself, an ethical gesture of welcoming what is different (*dia-legein*)' (Kearney, 1995: xvi). Put another way, as a way of thinking at the limit and beyond the presently imposed limit conditions, poetics, as a practice of the invisible, is compelled by a thinking of what has not yet been said, compelled by a possibility of possibilising the impossible and this '"not yet said" is the "possible", the "unfamiliar", the "alien", the "extraordinary" (Kearney, 1995: 48). A poetics of the possible takes on the aporetic difficulties of articulating the impossibility of the 'not-yet' and the 'to-come' even as it sets to work the difficulties of articulating, of giving shape, a figure or a voice to these unimaginable possibilities to come (Kearney, 1995). As Michael Dillon (1996) explains, "[T]he poetic [...] recalls the 'must'. By articulating, in all its aporetic difficulties, the burden of its undecidability, the poetic contributes towards replenishing the ethical energy which 'the must' demands of us, in a world in which we are habitually preoccupied with oneself and the everyday" (Dillon, 1996: 201). As Kearney (1995) also indicates, what all poetic events share is a 'participation in the *saying of being*' (Kearney, 1995: xiii) and as he insightfully explains, poetics is a '*productive* act beholden to something beyond itself [and] includes the threefold function of cultivating (*colere*), constructing (*aedificare*), and letting dwell by unfolding something into the fullness of its being (*producere*)' (Kearney, 1995: xiii).

As a way of approaching a thinking of the practices underpinning the politics of the invisible, poiesis is the opening of the relation with the radically non-relational. As Kearney (1995) explains, poiesis transgresses the limitations of the cognitive and

calculable as it 'demands a sense that there is something radically irrepresentable [...] something that prevents the object from being exhaustively represented in discourse by means of a concept, something that would [...] suspend the possibility of determinate judgment. We would then find ourselves in the ethical and aesthetic domains barred from the cognitive' (Kearney, 1995: xiii-xiv). However, poiesis, or poetic productivity is not a refusal of cognitive understanding. Rather, it is that which takes place at the limits of the intelligible and calculable. The indeterminacy of poiesis is aligned with the gambit and rather akin to the poker-like wager, poiesis is 'more approximative, provisional, tentative, more informed by the hit-and-miss, trial-and-error contexts of lived experience' (Kearney, 1995: xiv).

As a practice of the invisible, the incommensurability-vision of poiesis is provoked by *Desdemona*'s performance of an inoperative community. By refusing to posit a determinate answer to the question (What am 'I'? What are 'We'?), *Desdemona*'s inoperative community performs a non-closure to that question. As a practice of the invisible, the radical relation to the radically non-relational is opened up by the poetics of *Desdemona*'s in-operative community. As a writing in blindness, poetics is written 'in the passion of non-knowledge rather than the secret' (Derrida, 1991a: 75), written in a desire for and of the in-coming of the Other even as the Other retains that invisibility. In short, I suggest that *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community exemplifies the apophaticism of poetics.

By posing the question 'Who am I? What are We?' *Desdemona*'s performance of the in-operative community struggles against, as indicated, answering that question too hastily. Rather, what is dramatized is the attempt to keep open that question, to keep it open and alive in order to preserve the question in a space that refuses all ready-made identifications and hasty prescriptions. Instead, I suggest that what *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community alludes to, and is equivalent to, is that of apophasis, a thinking at the limit that resists hasty closures. As a way of being with the radical non-relational, this apophatic boldness of poiesis is opposed to the metaphysical onto-theologic political disposition underlying the

politics of the visible expressed as a desire to know and to be absolutely.[11] As Derrida has also reminded us, apophatic discourse is a type of discourse that is threatening to any order. In many ways this is similar to the philosophy of the limit which is how Drucilla Cornell (1992) has termed deconstruction. The essential trait of this 'apophatic boldness' as Derrida indicates, 'consists in going further than is reasonably permitted [...] passing to the limit, then crossing a frontier, including that of a community, thus of a sociopolitical, institutional, ecclesial reason or *raison d'etre*' (Derrida, 1992c: 284).

Instead of deciding or prescribing programmatically what constitutes the proper, essential name of 'What am I? Who are We?' or for that matter, what the community-to-come is or should be, what is exemplified instead by *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is the refusal of circumscribing that proper name of the community. By refusing to circumscribe what that community-to-come ought to be, it poses instead what it is not, what it should not be. As Jean-Luc Nancy (1996) explains, the community of the question is instead perpetually renewed and perpetually deferred. It is neither this nor that. Not this and not that. Instead of resorting to a *kataphatic* gesture that attempts to prescribe, delimit and enframe what we are and what we should be, the apophatic gesture dramatized by *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is suggestive of the refusal of that interpretive drive to pre-determine the truth and the secret in that question. What is kept open instead by that question is an apophatic freedom, which is the freedom made available by the unknowability and invisibility of the question of the 'I' and the 'We'. In short, what is exemplified *Desdemona*'s apophatic poetics and what is located in that question of 'Who am I? What are We?' is the 'freedom to reinvent ourselves, to reinvent an accepted worldview' (Ong, 2000: 6), the freedom to find new modes of invention and self-representation. As Kearney (1998) explains, the productivity of poetics is that of practice and is compelled by 'an exploration of the human powers to make (*poiesis*) a world in which we may poetically dwell' (Kearney, 1998: 8). For Kearney, while poetics may be compelled by a certain intentionality (in this case, the intention to effect transformations and rethink possibilities), it is also a part of the *unthought* and

---

[11] Apophasis is a term first encountered in Dionysius the Areopagite's *Theological Mystica* (c. 500). Inherent to negative theology, apophatics opposes *kataphatic* discourse which speaks of what God is *like*. In contrast, apophatic discourse speaks instead of what God is *not like*.

'escapes the transcendental imagination of metaphysical thought' (Kearney, 1998: 53). In other words, the apophaticism of poiesis is underpinned by a "foundationless foundation of our 'knowledge of all things'. It is the blind spot [...] the invisible source of our vision: that which makes a world possible [...] It is a *poiesis* without why" (Kearney, 1998: 53).

Compelled by a thinking otherwise and the desire for a radical way of being with the radically non-relational, the apophaticism of poiesis thus becomes a way of fashioning and exploring new possibilities of being, of exploring alternate pluralized possibilities of being with the radical non-relationality of the Other. As a thinking otherwise and the 'not-yet', the apophaticism of poiesis is akin to a writing in blindness and transgresses the onto-theologic desire of visibility politics which is often driven by the desire to know and to be absolutely. In other words, as a practice of the invisible, the apophaticism of poiesis is a defiance of the onto-theologic thinking underpinning the totalizing thinking of presence and the eschaton. If we have learnt our lesson from Derrida, we should then exercise similar caution when we surge forth intent on deciphering and decoding the text, to look behind the frame (as it were) in an attempt to decode an originary Meaning and Truth. The mistake then would be to 'arrest the text in a certain position, thus settling on a thesis, meaning or truth' (Derrida, 1995: 96). Instead, as Derrida suggests, knowing is structured by non-knowing, by the invisibility of the truth, of the secret. Undoubtedly, our structural blindness – our non-knowing is what drives us in our passion to decipher the secret or the truth, to arrest the play of meanings and possibilities in order to settle on some essential truth. However, Derrida teaches us that the 'readability of a text is structured by the unreadability of the secret, that is, by the inaccessibility of a certain intention, meaning, or of wanting to say' (Derrida, 1991b: 152). For Derrida, the radical non-relationality of the invisible haunts the 'visible as its very possibility' (Derrida, 1993a: 45). However, this does not mean that Derrida is suggesting that we align ourselves with the unintelligible. Rather, he argues that our knowledge practices are always already structured by a non-knowing. There is always already a stain in the field of our present-vision. As he explains it,

> I am all for knowledge [...] so this non-knowing [...] it is not the limit [...] of a knowledge, the limit in the progression of a knowledge. It is, in some way, a structural non-knowing, which is heterogeneous, foreign to

> knowledge. It is not just the unknown that could be known and that I give up trying to know. It is something in relation to which knowledge is out of the question. And when I specify that it is non-knowing and not a secret, I mean that when a text appears to be crypted, it is at all in order to calculate or to intrigue or to bar access to something I know and that others must not know; it is a more ancient, more originary experience, if you will, of the secret (Derrida, 1995: 201).

As a practice of the invisible, the incommensurability-vision of poetics is equivalent to the *punctum caecum* that Merleau-Ponty speaks of, the blind spot that commemorates the blindness at the heart of the visible, knowing as chiasmically intertwined by non-knowing. To be other to the visible, the poiesis of the in-operative community that *Desdemona* puts into play eludes decipherability and ready-made enframements of what constitutes the 'We' of community. As a practice of the invisible, the incommensurability-vision of poiesis suggests that 'to see is always to see more than one sees [...] One has to understand that it is visibility itself that involves a non-visibility—In the very measure that I see, I do not know what I see [...] The invisible of the visible' (Merleau-Ponty, 2000: 247). Perhaps what is even suggested by the poetics of *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is the hospitality offered to the Other to come, to the potential 'invisible community, the invisible other, the invisible culture' (Merleau-Ponty, 2000: 229) to come.

As a thinking at the limit, this thinking about the radically irrepresentable, which is how Kearney defines poetics, is also detectable in Foucault. Foucault's emphasis on critical ontology is the point of contact with this thinking about poiesis, that of a practice guided by a thinking of the limit coordinated by a desire to (re)think the possible. In Foucault, I detect this opening of the relation with the radically non-relational. For the purposes of this chapter, I suggest that one of the sites in which we can locate the irrepresentable and a thinking at the limits in Foucault is that of heterotopias. As Kearney (1998) observes, the otherness of heterotopias dislocates and "'dessicates speech and dissolves our myths'. As such, they shatter the limits of the transcendental imagination and bring human language and thought to the threshold of their impossibility" (Kearney, 1998: 183-194).

As noted, as a performance-as-critique to the official discourse of Singaporean multiculturalism, *Desdemona*'s inoperative community performs a refusal to enforce the answer to the question (Who am I? What are We?). By refusing to contract and coalesce into the fixities of community-securing practices that construct distinctions between members and its Other(s), the incommensurability-vision of *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is suggestive of those moments of opacity and unknowability when the regulatory surveillance of that social space fails. As such, the incommensurability-vision of *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community is suggestive of heterotopias. Heterotopias, as Foucault conceptualizes it, are those disturbing and inconsistent spatial configurations that undermine the dominant spatial-visual regime.

As was indicated in Chapter 1, heterotopias are Other spaces. These are the lived, everyday, real embodied spaces. As spaces of contestation, these are the heterogeneous spaces that attempt to reconceive or re-think the conditions of our existence (Foucault, 1998: 179). Like the anamorphic blot in Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, these representational spaces are equivalent to the stain in the field of vision and which eludes, evades and undermines the tyranny of the all-knowing gaze of the dominant visual-spatio regime that attempts to fix and entrap us into a determinate identity. More akin to off-stage spaces that lie beyond the knowing gaze and observation of elite powerholders, heterotopias, as Foucault conceives them, are "real places, actual places, places that are designed into the very institution of society, [that] are at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable. Because they are utterly different from all other emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places 'heterotopias' [...] they are different spaces ...other places, a kind of contestation, both mythical and 'real', of the place in which we live. This description could be called 'heteropology' (Foucault, 1998: 178-9).

Foucault suggests that these heterotopias are Other spaces. These spaces, inhabited by the lived, embodied spaces of affective body-subjects, are the lived factical spaces that locate the agonism of critical ontology, that which is compelled by the exploration of what it means to be and to be-come otherwise. But the agonal exploration of this question, and of new possibilities of being in the world, is not, for

Foucault, the transcendence to yet another new (and potentially fossilizable) essentialist identity position that risks congealing into another form of constraining identity position. As Simons (1995) explains it, for Foucault, the critical ontology underlining the exploration of imposed limits and the desire to transgress those limits is 'an analysis of the limits of our being, not in the sense of an essential, unchanging being but contingent, plural and transformable ways of being human subjects [and the] analysis of the limits to subjectivity which are to transgressed' (Simons, 1995: 68-69). For Foucault, an agonistic critical ontology demonstrates that no limits are absolute (Simons, 1995). In other words, Foucault acknowledges that while there are relations of power, there are also apt to be practices of resistances. However, these power relations and knowledge practices are also practices of the limit, of defining the limit-condition. But the impositions of these limit-conditions (of what we can say, of what we can do and the imposition of what is the only possible possible) are also correlative with conditions of possibility. For Foucault, limits are not only oppressive. They are enabling and the conditions of possibility for re-thinking who we are and what we are. As a lived, embodied subject, the body-subject is indebted to those power-knowledge practices as these practices also render the body-subject securable and calculable. However, subjectivity as imposed limitations also condition the agonistic struggle for new forms of subjectivities, for a thinking otherwise of those imposed limit-conditions. In short, as practices of resistances to limit-conditions, the agonism underpinning critical ontology is better explained as an adversarial relationship that attempts to 'escape the particular strategy of power relation that directs one's conduct [...] The word suggest a contest involving strategy, reaction and even taunting, as in a wrestling match [...] It permeates all the different relationships (economic, familial, communicative and sexual) within which power relations are immanent' (Simons, 1995: 85). As Simons (1995) explains it, for Foucault, an agonistic critical ontology often takes the form of transgression and critiques of imposed limitations and limit-conditions. And crucially, the stranglehold of the limit-condition is often tested and explored, for Foucault, in 'self-reflective forms of art, literature and philosophy that make transgressive moves by revealing the limits of language and thought without attempting to exist beyond them' (Simons, 1995: 69).

In other words, suggested by the agonism of critical ontology is that of an ethical embodied self-formation that is guided by an ethic of resistance, of testing and exploring the limit-conditions of the present. Since, for Foucault, freedom is the ontological condition of ethics (Foucault, 1996: 435), then an agonal subjectivity that is coordinated by the struggle for freedom and the struggle against closures 'is an affirmation of life as it is. An ethic of permanent resistance is an approach to life that is at once playful and serious; both unbearably light and unbearably heavy' (Simons, 1995; 87). Recall the earlier discussion of the incommensurability-vision of poiesis as underscored by an ethics of the possible guided by a hospitability shown to the invisible Other to-come. For Foucault, the spaces that locate the agonism of critical ontology, that which is guided by an agonal possibilising of the impossible, which is that of poiesis, are heterotopias. Heterotopias, the spaces of contestation to limit-conditions, are the spaces where the very grounds of securing categorizations and knowledge formations are made impossible.

These heterotopias, the embodied, representational spaces of the body-subject are underscored by the continual interrogation of questions of ontology (Who am I? What am I? What are We?). To reiterate, for Foucault, they are the spaces of contestation and radical openness that contain the possibilities of new discoveries and alternate ways of being. In short, as heterotopias, these representational spaces locate the struggle and the capacity to be otherwise. We make our space and spatialities in the process of our various identity-formations. But we also create and clear an agonal space in the process of realizing our agonal subjectivities when we attempt to test those limits in our agonistic desire to push beyond and re-think those power-knowledge practices that institute those closures. As Foucault has indicated, all such struggles 'revolve around the question: 'Who are we?'" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 212). For Foucault, these heterotopic spaces are the spaces of non-closures that localize the refusal to be reduced to a fixed, essential meaning, a refusal to be trapped within the constraints and prohibitions of power plays and circumscriptions of identity formations. Heterotopias, then, are the spaces of contestation, they are 'different spaces...other places, a kind of contestation, both mythical and real, of the place in which we live' (Foucault, 1998: 179). However, Foucault wants to keep the question of 'Who are we? Who am I?' open and alive and he refuses to answer or to posit an answer in a determinate way. Hence, it is a question that has to be

constantly re-launched. Like the inoperative community performed by the *Desdemona*, this question of the 'We' is a question that has to be constantly re-thought, and these re-launchings of the question are coordinated by an apophaticism of poetics, including a hospitability accorded toward the community-to-come. As I understand it, Foucault's desire to keep open the question signals also the desire to keep open the future, which is simultaneous with a refusal to delimit or to contract into yet another repressive and enframed identity constitution:

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of "double bind" which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 216)

This refusal to contract into an identity also denotes an exercise of freedom. As noted, freedom, for Foucault, is the ontological condition of ethics (Foucault, 1996: 435). Moreover, freedom, for Foucault, is irrepressible, a refusal and a continual and agonal twisting away from the historical forms of identity constitutions in which we assume we are always already enframed. Far from reducing freedom, relations of power over freedom implies resistance and this resistance implies the exercise of freedom which also signals the capacity for innovation and novelty, the capacity to move beyond a particular historical or political enframement of identity or subject formation. Which is not to say that this exercise of freedom is necessarily a transcendence to yet another more fundamental truth-claim. Rather, this exercise of freedom is more suggestive of a refusal and a resistance, a movement away and a constant twisting loose from the confines of the present order in order to find new forms of variation: 'to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 216). And in refusing to posit or enforce an answer of 'Who are we? Who am I?' Foucault wants to defend the impossibility of reducing the answer to that question to a singular truth in order to shelter the irreducibility of the question from a determinate or programmatic decision. We are more than our always already sets of enframements, we never are and we are more than what we have been constituted to be, something different is always possible. In keeping open the question, Foucault keeps open the future. In doing so, what is also kept open is the

space for the possibilities of new modes of modifications, self-invention and self-representation including the capacity to refuse those identities that have been imposed upon us by historical and political formations. It gestures, in other words, to the capacity to be otherwise than the present. Here, we find Foucault's position of keeping open the question and hence, keeping open the future corresponding somewhat to Derrida's call for *l'invention de l'autre*, the preparation for the coming that is coordinated by the affirmative call to the in-coming of something wholly Other (*toute autre*).

As Derrida has remarked, the 'I' and the 'We' are marked by the capacity to be otherwise, the capacity for new modes of difference, and what is proper to the identity of a Self or a culture

> is not to be identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "I" or "we"; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference with itself (*avec soi*) (Derrida, 1992b: 9)

In other words, the condition of possibility in the constitution of an enframed 'We' and a circumscribed 'I' is also condition of an im-possibility in the full realization of that constitution. As indicated, *Desdemona* exemplifies this refusal to be delimited. Instead, as a performance of the community of the question, *Desdemona* keeps open the question and refuses instead a programmatic decision of the answer to that question: 'Who am I? What are We?' As Ong Keng Sen, the director of TheatreWorks, indicates, the interculturalism of TheatreWorks' various productions allows him 'a way out of the [limiting strictures of the] box' (Grehan, 2001: 115). As I have suggested, *Desdemona*'s performance-as-critique is a 'thinking out of the box' of Singapore's official authorization of the multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference which is simultaneous with the production of the unified and homogenized 'We'. In addition, for the purposes of the chapter, what *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community also allows me to think through is the ethic put into play. By performing the inoperative community, and by inhabiting and bringing together multiple, composite, heterogeneous identity-positions that refuse to be completely defined, the apophatic poiesis of *Desdemona* refuses to identify the secret or the truth to that question, preferring instead the potency of that question remaining incalculable.

As indicated, what is dramatized in the heterotopic space of *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is an apophatic boldness, of a subjectivity as resistance and refusal, namely the refusal to contract into a fixed and essential identity positions. Against the normalizing constitution of subjects who are marked and rendered visible and knowable within the regulative standard of Singapore's multiculturalism, what the poiesis of *Desdemona* localizes is that of Foucault's position, that is to say, that these struggles to be otherwise to what we presently are assert the right to be different, the right to diverge from an identity, the right to resist those normative ideas that tie the subject to his/her own identity and topos in a constraining way. As Foucault indicates, these struggles "are not for or against the 'individual', but rather they are against the government of individualization" (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983: 212). In other words, it is not that Foucault has a determinate and normative idea of what constitutes an individual. Rather, Foucault wants to resist a determinate answer to that question. He wants to resist the development of the decision of what constitutes an individualized subject or of what constitutes the 'We' and the attendant administrative practices that attend to the constitution of such subjects are, for Foucault, precisely the problem; and it is exactly what these struggles are struggling against. As noted, as a performance-as-critique to the official discourse of multiculturalism, the heterotopic space of *Desdemona* localizes this very agonal struggle and refusal to be rendered knowable and hence, representable. For this visibility, as I have already suggested, is a politics associated with the surveillance of the calculative-representative gaze of the state's administrative practices.

To sum, I suggest that by performing the community of the question, *Desdemona*'s apophatic poetics localizes a struggle, which is the struggle for and on behalf of alterity and heterogeneity. This struggle is thus one which seeks the opening of a radical relation to the radically non-relational. As David Campbell (1998) explains,

> the principle being articulated here goes beyond the narrow and static confines of tolerance and maintains that the active affirmation of alterity *must* involve the desire to actively resist – perhaps, depending on the circumstances, even violently – those forces that efface, erase, or suppress alterity. That which is to be opposed is not simply what which causes disturbance or irritation. There will always be an agonistic and

> sometimes antagonistic relationship between numerous identities and settlements that variously contain difference (Campbell, 1998: 206).

However, this agonal struggle is also an affirmative call to the wholly Other. This call to the Other is a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness that eludes our present-vision and is thus unsymbolizable. *Desdemona* localizes this very struggle for a capacity to be otherwise to who we presently are. Thus, it gestures to a resistance to the discursive machinations of a multicultural discourse bent on a totalizing, normalizing production of a consensus that delimits and enframes the 'We' of this community. By refusing the codifying characteristic to multiculturalism's system of signification and thus refusing visibility and decipherability of strict identity enframements, *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is suggestive of the apophaticism of poiesis which is also a hospitality granted to the Other to come. For Derrida, the Other refers to both the Other (the stranger) of community to come and the otherness of the future community to come, and this relation to Otherness also raises the question of hospitality that is extended to this Other to come. Perhaps this is the ethic put into play by the heterotopic space of *Desdemona*, that of the apophaticism of poiesis. As an alternate way of being with Otherness, the politics and ethics put into play by *Desdemona*'s poetics names a refusal of the proprietorial relationship with the Other construed here as underpinned by a metaphysical politics of the visible. Opened up by the inoperative community of *Desdemona* is that of the radical relation with the radically non-relational, the incommensurability-vision of poiesis.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I suggest that what is put into play in *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is that of an ethical stance of being with the Other which is that of an ethics as a responsibility of the Self toward the alterity of the Other. This ethical way of being with the Other is to be distinguished from ethical command which Kearney (1995) indicates is a strict adherence to formal rules and prescriptions. Ethics, as Kearney explains in his reading of the tensions between the poetic and the ethical, is a way of being-toward-others 'that goes by the name of solidarity, social justice' (Kearney, 1995: xii). I suggest that in *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community, we glimpse this way of being-towards-otherness, which represents a

movement away from atomistic individuality and a recognition that a being in the world is chiasmically intertwined with that of a being with others in unassimilable difference. Because the Self is the topos of the ethical encounter, because it is in the specificity of lived facticity of embodied representational spaces where we encounter the challenge of being with alterity and heterogeneity, these are then the spaces in which the political takes place. However, this taking place of the political is, as Dillon (1996) also explains, opened to the possibilities of taking place differently and is attuned to a poetics of possibility which is the 'art of making way for new possibilities of being' (Dillon, 1996: 202). And as Campbell and Dillon (1993) indicate, 'the struggle for the political [...] can be no other than an ethical engagement with human being' (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 17).

In *Desdemona* what is offered is a different account of the official encoding of the multicultural community of the 'We'. Lurking within this official vision of the multicultural community is that of an onto-theological demand to secure and manage alterity, which is characterized by a totalitarian political disposition to homogenize human life into complete uniformity (Critchley, 1993). Offered by *Desdemona*'s poiesis is another form of thinking and relating to the Other, another political disposition, that of a radical relation with the alterity of the Other and forms of Otherness. For the purposes of this chapter, I suggest that this alternate vision is that of the community of the question, a community as a unity-in-difference and a difference-in-unity. Crucially, as Campbell and Dillon (1993) explain, this model of the community of the question is not

> a fusion of beings, a unifying organic whole, the dream of transparent social organization based upon the specular recognition of the self and other. It is a community [that] allows the notion of a relationship in-common. That is to say, both of commonality (we share) and of difference (we remain un-common, one to another) [...] a space where sharing without sublimation is possible. This offers a way back to politics because that sharing [...] is a practice of *partage*; a political practice (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 27).

As Simon Critchley (1993) also explains it, this form of community, that of the inoperative community, is one that is based on alterity and incompletion. As a form of

unity-in-distinction, a community of sharing and of difference, this community of *partage*, as Critchley (1993) explains, "is expressed in the polysemic formula, 'toi (e(s)t) (tout autre que) moi' [...] which expresses both sharing [...] in the relation between you and me (*toi et moi*), where you are me (*toi est moi*); but where this sharing is itself sustained by the recognition of division, where you are wholly other than me (*toi est tout autre que moi*)" (Critchley, 1993: 88). In other words, rather than embracing the onto-theological demand to secure a homogeneous and sovereign 'We' of the community which would come close to what Levinas would refer to the totality, the in-operative community is a disturbance of community-securing practices, which is also related to the disturbance of sovereignty politics for the sake of politics. The in-operative community, then, is posed as the disturbance of a politics that is obsessed with foundations, original causes, and more crucially, a disturbance of sovereignty politics that presuppose a sovereign political subject that is always already visible, knowable and hence, calculable for the sake of a smooth functioning of diverse governmental technologies. Offered up by the in-operative community is the resistance to, and the refusal of, the grammars of sovereign power of onto-theological politics that seek to narrate an alleged unity of the members of a specific community defined by, for example, race, religion, ethnicity or a common history which would amount to 'a fusion of being, a unifying organic whole, the dream of a transparent organization based upon the specular recognition of the self and other' (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 27). As a form of unity-in-distinction, of *partage*, the in-operative community introduces a political moment, which is the contingency and incommensurabilities that lie at the heart of the multiplicity that is essential to politics and community. Such a politics, introduced by the in-operative community, allows the manifestation of dissensus, contingency and the freedom to speak and to disagree. As Erin Manning explains, '[W]hat is ordinarily seen as politics – the procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved – is not politics at all, but rather a form of governance, "the police," in Ranciere's terms' (Manning, 2004: 62). In short, what is allowed in the in-operative community is firstly, the freedom of dissension, and secondly, the deformation of governmental technologies that constantly seeks the pacification and the production of consensus via the domination of political spaces. As Critchley notes, '[I]f the activity of government continually risks pacification, order, the state, and what Ranciere refers to as the 'idyll of consensus', then politics consists in the manifestation of *dissensus*, a

dissensus that disturbs the order by which government wishes to depoliticize society' (Critchley, 2004: 183). Thus, as a form of thinking the community, the in-operative allows one to think through community as a hospitality extended to alterity and incommensurabilities, one that deforms the desire of sovereignty politics, introducing instead the idea of community as incompletion, the idea of democracy as process and politicization and the cultivation of a political space that is better thought of, to borrow a phrase from Simon Critchley (2004: 183), as a 'dissensual emancipatory praxis'.

In addition, as a way of being with otherness, what is underlined by the inoperative community is one that is distinguished by listening-out for a call to the Other to come. As Dillon (1996) explains, this 'call' to the Other is also characterized by an ethical relationship to the Other whereupon our selves are always already traversed by an Otherness from which we cannot escape. As Jean-Luc Nancy usefully (1996) clarifies, this 'call' to the Other is not to be thought in terms of an 'invocation, proclamation or declaration' (Nancy, 1996: 71). This call to the Other is also a question of a thinking at the limits. For Derrida, this call to the Other is a passion for the impossible and a question of a thinking at the limit beyond current knowability and representability. Such a thinking at the limit moves to the Beyond, and it is a question of eschatological desire which I explore in the next chapter, Chapter 4. For Derrida, this call and response to the Other can be understood in terms of an invitation and hospitality, not as a proclamation or a constative declaration: '"Come" [*Viens*] beyond being – this comes from beyond being and calls beyond being, engaging, starting perhaps in the place where *Enteignis* unfold the movement of propriation [...] "Come" does not address itself, does not appeal, to an identity determinable in advance. It is a drift [...] underivable from the identity of a determination. "Come" is not derivable, absolutely derivable, but only from the other, from nothing that may be an origin or a verifiable, decidable, presentable, appropriate identity' (Derrida, 1992d: 66). As Critchley (2000) clarifies, this to-come (the *a venir*) is not to be confused with the living present. Like the messianic event of the here and now, it signals an advent. While the 'to-come' has the structure of the futural and that of the promise, it is an arrival that is happening now. But the 'to-come' also has the character of the incalculable and the irrepresentable. However, as a process of politicization, the Other 'to-come', as Critchley (2000) explains in his

reading of Derrida's democracy-to-come, provides a 'constant critical pressure upon the state, a pressure of emancipatory intent aiming at its infinite amelioration, the endless betterment of actually existing democracy' (Critchley, 2000: 464). In other words, the promise of the 'to-come' is also a matter of disposition, of the search for better approximations, of pluralized possibilities of being otherwise and for a different variation of being with the Other and forms of otherness. As Campbell (1998) clarifies, '[J]ustice, democracy, and emancipation are not conditions to be achieved but ambitions to be strived for; they are promises the impossibility of which ensures their possibility; they are ideals that to remain practical must always be still *to come.* The agonistic space created by the moving poles of the double imperative is the necessary conditions for ethics, politics, and responsibility' (Campbell, 1998: 207).

In other words, as a passion for the impossible, the apophaticism of poiesis is underlined by the desire of the Other to-come and this call to the Other makes the limit-conditions of the present waver. As noted, by refusing to posit a programmatic answer to the question (Who are 'We'? What are 'We'?), *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is also an affirmation of a thinking otherwise of the official multicultural encoding of the community of the 'We'. In affirming the otherwise and an otherness to-come, the gift given to me by *Desdemona* is also a question of disposition. By insisting on the affirmative tone, by keeping open the question of the 'We' of community, *Desdemona* also opens up a hospitality to the community to-come. However, this call to the Other which is also a hospitality to the Other is underlined, for Derrida, by a call to Justice. And this call to Justice-to-come is also a matter of finding better approximations and other ways of thinking and acting which are adequate to our present blindness and non-knowing. Writing on Derrida's conception of justice, Geoffrey Bennington indicates: '[J]ustice is always demanded *now*, in a moment of decision which stands a chance of being just only if it takes on the undecidable [...] only [...] if it escapes any horizon of knowledge [...] justice-as-decision is never present, always come from the other [...] an experience of the impossible [...] whence the need to compromise, negotiate, with the most concrete detail of current arrangements of right: this is what defines deconstruction as radically political' (Bennington, 2000: 192). In other words, the symbolizing function of the apophaticism of poiesis thus requires that 'We' act in the here and now but as Caputo (1987) indicates, the productivity of this requirement to 'act' is one which is

underlined by an ethical strain, that of Derridean undecidability: '[W]e act, but we act with a heightened sense of the delimitations of subjectivity, not sure of this "we" or who or what acts within us or what deeper impulses are at work on us. We act with fear and trembling, with a deep sense of *ebranler*, whose tremors are all around us' (Caputo, 1987: 239-240). In short, in the face of the impossible, confronted by the undecidability of the decision and the incalculability of justice, the productivity of poiesis thus require us to calculate and, for Derrida, the necessity of this requirement to calculate is also underlined by an interminable process of decisioning and negotiation. It makes an exception of every moment of decision while maintaining the possibility of necessary critique of the limits of our present-vision.

To reiterate, by insisting on an affirmative tone to the radically non-relationality of the Other, *Desdemona* also locates the apophatic call to the wholly other. As noted, as a practice of the invisible, the apophaticism of poiesis is a *productive* act that is beholden to something Other and which goes toward a something that is beyond the Self. To sum, poetics, as a way of being with the radically non-relationality of the Other, is coordinated by an openness towards an otherness and a way of cultivating a thinking otherwise. Poiesis, as incommensurability-vision, becomes an act of re-figuration and re-imagination where its significance is 'accorded a sense beyond the immediately graspable and calculable' (Kearney, 1995: xiii).

Equally, as a practice of the invisible, poetics, as it is revealed and cultivated in *Desdemona*'s inoperative community is a way of imagining the Other and forms of Otherness differently. To imagine the Other differently is also a way toward thinking an alliance between the poetic and the political, a way of moving beyond the ontotheological desire underlying a visibility politics: 'to imagine the other is to imagine *differently*. It is, in itself, an ethical gesture of welcoming what is different (*dia-legein*) [opening] a special space in which poetics and ethics may convene' (Kearney, 1995: xvi). Put another way, as a practice of the invisible, the apophaticism of poetics is coordinated by a thinking otherwise compelled by the desire to reach out towards Otherness which becomes a way of thinking the impossible, of imagining things existing *otherwise*.

Poiesis, then, is an opening up of a radical way of being with the Other. It is then a matter of disposition. As Kearney (1998) indicates, poetic imagination, becomes a way of fashioning and exploring new possibilities of being, of envisioning how the world and how one could be-come otherwise. Poetics, as Kearney (1998) indicates, is 'the very precondition of human freedom [...] to be free means to be able to surpass the empirical world as it is given here and now in order to project new *possibilities* of existence. It is because we can imagine that we are at liberty to anticipate how things *might be*; to envision the world *as if* it were otherwise; to make absent alternatives present to the mind's eye' (Kearney, 1998: 6). At the same time, poetics is dynamic and irrepressible. This is because it is motivated by a perpetual desire for a thinking otherwise. For Kearney (1998), poetics is also a condition of the freedom of human being expressed by the desire for possibility: 'the dynamic imagination charges our drive to form and to cultivate [...] It is rather a call to our freedom, the very paste of possibility from which we must wrest new forms' (Kearney, 1998: 107). Hence, the agonistic struggle for a be-coming otherwise – for we do not know who we are – yet. As an ethics of possibility, the apophaticism of poetics is underlined by the agonistic struggle for the otherwise and the aporetic difficulties confronted by the urge to possibilise the 'not-yet'. This is an embodied struggle, a struggle for the possibility for a different variation of being – if it is at all possible. Writing on being-human as a site of a being-of-possibility, Michael Dillon (1996) has also remarked that

> [H]uman being must necessarily also be thought as free; free to take-up the difficult and inescapable challenge it encounters in itself as a possibility, and make that possibility its own. For if the human were not free, in the condition of having its being as a possibility to be, there would be no action to take, no decision to make, no dilemmas to face, no relations to relate, no loves to love, no fears to fear [...]. There would, in short, be no politics. Consequently, the very project of politics is made possible by human being as a possibility. A possibility engendered by the freedom of human being as a possibility [...] (Dillon, 1996:1- 2).

Rather than contract into the tragic and the melancholic, what is affirmed by *Desdemona*'s apophatic boldness is the refusal to be delimited into a given identity,

a continually twisting loose from the historical forms of life by which it is always already shaped. Freedom, understood in this way, in its lack of essence indicates instead the capacity for novelty and innovation and the capacity to move beyond a certain historical constitution and determination. This is what Spivak also means when she says that 'the agenda of onto-cultural commitments is negotiable' and, for Spivak, this also means that the agonism and the specificity of postcoloniality has to be understood as taking a position, not in terms 'of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding' (Spivak, 1990: 228).

Desdemona, I suggest, can be read in terms of a radical relation with the Other's otherness, and a negotiation with the force of presencing witnessed in the present claims of Singaporean multiculturalism. Secondly, in the dialogue and negotiation with the colonial past and the limits of the present, what is moreover opened up is the radical relation with the otherness of the future to come – an apophatic boldness that brings us up to the limit condition, underscored by a continual process of negotiation, anticipation and hospitality to the Otherness of the community to-come. This affirmative call to the Other to-come is also an affirmation of the 'blindness' in which we 'write' and the affirmation that our non-knowing is also the condition of possibility for a different variation of being in the world and being with others. As a practice of the invisible, the apophaticism of poetics is an affirmative call to the incomings of the Other which Derrida has called *l'inventions de l'autre*. Thus, the very project of politics is made possible by this possibility to be otherwise. A possibility, as indicated, engendered by the freedom of the human body-subject as potentiality. And the condition of possibility of this hospitality to the in-coming of the Other is made possible by an ethical subjectivity having in its being an affirmative possibility to be with the Other. In this light, this makes an exception of every decision while maintaining the necessary critique of the limits of our present-vision.

What is opened up by keeping open the question of the 'We' is the possibility of change, the possibility that we will not be what we have been. Structured around this search is that of an eschatological desire opened up by the challenge of the radical alterity of the Other and forms of otherness which I explore in the next chapter. Structured around this search for the 'not-yet' is the apophaticism of poetics, a

writing in the blindness of non-knowledge, a writing that acknowledges the necessity of keeping open the question: for we do not know who we are – yet.

Chapter 4

TheatreWorks *Lear* and the Challenge of Radical Alterity

> The future is only probable, but it is not an empty zone in which we can construct gratuitous projects; it is sketched before us like the beginning of the day's end, and its outline is ourselves.
>
> Maurice Merleau-Ponty

> Yesterday, you may remember, we made each other a promise. I now recall it, but you already sense all the trouble we will have in ordering all these presents: these past presents which consist of the present of a promise, whose opening toward the present to come is not that of an expectation or an anticipation but that of commitment.
>
> Jacques Derrida

Introduction

How do we write and read in the blindness? How does one write without seeing? As Derrida suggests in *Memoirs of the Blind*, the operation of drawing, by which I also include writing in the broadest sense, has 'something to do with blindness' (Derrida, 1993a: 2). For Derrida the very act of writing or drawing in blindness has something to do with faith and the invention of the Other. This drawing in blindness of the blind, which necessitates an invention, involves a potency that includes the possibilisation of the possible and is addressed to the Other.[1] It is given over to the Other who is to

---

[1] In his reflection on the theme of self-portraiture and blindness in *Memoirs of the Blind*, Derrida draws on the double genitive to indicate, 'a drawing of the *blind* is a drawing *of* the blind. Every time a draftsman lets himself be fascinated by the blind, every time he makes the blind a *theme* of his drawing, he projects, dreams [...] he begins to *represent* a drawing potency *[puissance]* at work, the very act of

come. Derrida's opening lines in *Memoirs of the Blind* suggest that this writing in the dark and in blindness relates to faith and belief. 'Vous croyez?' he asks (Derrida, 1993a: 1). Do you believe? Do you really believe this? In his concluding remarks to *Memoirs of the Blind*, he announces 'Do you believe? I don't know, one has to believe' [*Jen ne sais pas, il faut croire*] (Derrida, 1993a: 129).[2] For Derrida, there is no doubt that faith is required for a writing in the dark. He suggests that to write without seeing, to write in the dark of blindness requires a faith to venture forth into uncharted territory that like 'a hand of the blind ventures forth alone or disconnected, in a poorly delimited space; it feels its way, it gropes, it caresses as much as it inscribes' (Derrida, 1993a: 3). Seen in this light, writing in blindness accompanies what Derrida has termed the passion and faith of non-knowledge (Derrida, 1995). Faith, for Derrida, is the passion of non-knowing.[3] But one has to believe, according to him, precisely because one has no alternative but to believe in what is coming. For Derrida, this faith relates to the affirmation of the Other who is to come, the Other being, for example, a future to come, a justice to come, a community to come and an ethics to come. As a text that is devoted to blindness and invisibility, *Memoirs of the Blind* questions the perceptual certitude that accompanies visual perceptions and highlights instead both the misrecognition and the impossibility of complete knowability that underscores visual perception.

This thinking about the potency of blindness, about writing in the dark, about venturing forth towards the invisibility of the Other, is indebted to Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*, a text that haunts and provokes the work and the questions of this

---

drawing. He invents drawing. [...] that speculates, as in a dream, about its own possibility. Its potency always develops on the brink of blindness. Blindness pierces through right at that point and thereby gains *in potential, in potency*: the angle of a sight that is threatened *or* promised, lost *or* restored, given' (Derrida, 1993a: 2-3).

[2] Although Derrida suggests that faith is required to write in the dark, he also foregrounds the theme of skepticism *in Memoirs of the Blind*, from the Greek *skepsis*, announced by his 'Vous croyez?'. What is indicated is that this *skepsis* refers to 'visual perception, to the observation, vigilance, and attention of the gaze *[regard]* during an examination' (Derrida, 1993: 1). What is also announced by Derrida's reflections on blindness is his own chiasmic relationship to Merleau-Ponty's late work, notably his *The Visible and The Invisible* and although it is beyond the scope of this current project, we could hazard a guess by suggesting that both their work are characterized by an interrogation of the ontology of the visible that represent attempts to disrupt the metaphysics of presence. As such, it could be suggested that they represent, in their dual attempts, to move beyond the terminality of the limit defined by the eschatological practice of the visible.

[3] Faith, for Derrida, is structurally inhabited by blindness. As he indicates '[A]nd faith, in the moment proper to it, is blind. It sacrifices sight, even if it does so with an eye to seeing at last' (Derrida, 1993a: 30).

chapter. If this chapter is 'about' anything, it represents a desire and a modest attempt to understand the blindness and darkness in which we write and read in the broadest sense, and this includes the way in which we attempt to read the indecipherability of the Other who remains to us unknowable, who is Other to the visible: 'it is addressed not only from the blind to the blind, like a code for nonseeing, but speaks to us, in truth, all the time of the blindness that constitutes it. Language is spoken, it speaks to itself, which is to say, *from/of blindness*. It always speaks to us *from/of blindness* that constitutes it. [...] I write without seeing' (Derrida, 1993a: 4). In other words, when Derrida suggests in his philosophy of blindness that '[A] drawing of the *blind* is a drawing *of* the blind' (Derrida, 1993a: 2) he is indicating that the very act of drawing is blind and that a drawing of a blind subject is a drawing at the same time of the blindness of the draftsperson. Because drawing in itself is an act of blindness and the drawings that Derrida has chosen take the theme of blind men, drawings of the blind are also a kind of self-portrait of the artist, an allegory of the 'blindness' of the artist and writer who must respond to the Other. At the very moment I write and read, I am blind. The insights drawn from *Memoirs of the Blind* is that the radical alterity of the Other, an Otherness that is essentially indecipherable and unknowable determines and calls for, as I attempt to demonstrate in this chapter, a politically disposed reading practice that attempts to read and decipher the Other. Such an attempt, however, has to acknowledge the blindness in which we read and write. Drawing and writing is blind, Derrida (1993a: 2) indicates, and this uncertainty is associated with how we grapple with the unknowability of the Other, venturing forth into an unexplored terrain blindly feeling our way through darkness. But this blindness has nothing to do with despair or the tragic. It refers to, in our response to the Other, a responsibility that the Other insists on. And while this relation to the Other is underscored by the faith that accompanies both an aspiration to something different, aspiring to a be-coming-otherwise, such a venture by the blind into the unknowable terrain of the Other is essentially unknowable and fraught with the possibility of failure. Yet such a venture must be risked.[4]

---

[4] This venturing forth to the invisibility of the other, as Derrida reminds us, has to be risked: 'Like all blind men, they must *advance*, advance or commit themselves, that is, expose themselves, run through space as if running a risk. They are apprehensive about space, they apprehend it with their groping, wandering hands; they draw in this space in a way that is at once cautious and bold; they calculate, they count on the invisible. [...] These blind men explore – and seek to foresee there where they do not see, *no longer* see, or do *not yet* see' (Derrida, 1993: 5-6).

Blindness, as Derrida reminds us in *Memoirs of the Blind*, is the condition of possibility of drawing and writing. He says for example, '[...] one drew only on condition of not seeing, as if drawing were a declaration of love destined for or suited to the invisibility of the other – unless it were in fact born from seeing the other withdrawn from sight' (Derrida, 1993a: 49). This invisibility, as Derrida indicates throughout the text, is chiasmically intertwined with the visible. However, this includes and is transferable to how we think politics and the political when all our knowing, our standards and our institutionalization of norms and blue-prints for political practice are failing us. By drawing attention to the blindness at the heart of the visible, Derrida alerts us to how we always already write and read in blindness and in the dark. Derrida indicates that a drawing and writing from blindness involves journeying to the limits of visibility and possibility. By suggesting that the invisible haunts the visible as its very possibility, Derrida also indicates that the invisible haunts and tests the limits of the visible. But this blindness of non-knowing is nothing to despair over. As Derrida suggests, faith accompanies the passion of non-knowing, that it is this blindness that conditions our hospitality to the Other who is other to the visible, and who is also Other to our current practices of politics. An Otherness traverses us and draws us to the limits of our cognitive certainties. He suggests that a drawing from and in blindness 'always consists in journeying beyond limits' (Derrida, 1993a: 54). The invisible, that which we do not know (yet), refers to both our structural non-knowing and the limits of our current knowledge claims. For Derrida, the invisible, being Other to the visible includes that which is heterogeneous to knowledge-claims, interrupting the subject of knowledge who assumes to know in advance. In Derridean terms, this invisibility and blindness interrupts the metaphysics of presencing inherent in the formulation of 'I Am Who I Am' (Derrida, 1993a: 53-54).

Because an Otherness haunts us, because the Other brings us to the limits of our present-vision, decimating our perceptual faith, because the Other's otherness summons a radical relation to that which is radically non-relational, how, then, do we read and write in the dark? How do we read and hence respond to the Other who remains invisible and Other to us, whose Otherness is by definition an Other whose domain we cannot decipher or inhabit? This chapter grapples with these difficult questions by locating these questions in another TheatreWorks performance. To aid

thinking through these questions, I attempt to read, through a politically disposed reading practice the indecipherability of the Younger Daughter's silence in TheatreWorks' *Lear*. But in attempting this reading, I signal that this concern about the Other and forms of Otherness is also a constant one in deconstruction, which has always had an ethical and political force revolving around these questions. That this force has become apparent in recent years is undoubted as Derrida has increasingly taken up these questions with regard to, for example, the *aporia* of hospitality, friendship and community. As deconstruction continually insists, questions of how we welcome the Other into 'our' community, how we respond and be responsible to Otherness are all underscored by an ethical and political context. It should be noted that this reading of blindness and invisibility is another moment in Derrida's contemplations of the philosophy of the limit and his critique of the metaphysics of presence. Deconstruction, as a philosophy of the limit, which is how Drucilla Cornell termed deconstruction, has always demonstrated a concern with the relationship to the Other.[5] The Other, for Derrida, is the excess of the system and thus *cannot* be known positively. Yet, this chapter also raises the question of how we read the alterity of the Other which is 'beyond language and which summons language' (Derrida, 1984: 123). In my attempt to read the indecipherable silence of the Other, performed by the Silent Daughter in *Lear*, I demonstrate that if we are to heed the ethical relationship and responsibility to this otherness, we have to remain faithful to this otherness instead of assimilating it to the Same, instead of incorporating the Other into a system of conventional norms. For example, in Drucilla Cornell's feminist deconstructive alliance with critical legal studies, this thinking about the philosophy of the limit means that the quasi-transcendental conditions that establish any system (in her case, the legal system) implies a beyond and an Other to it and this is crucial to a re-conceptualization of justice that promotes and allows the possibility of legal transformations for marginalized groups who remain other to the legal system. [6]

---

[5] See Drucilla Cornell (1992) *The Philosophy of the Limit*, London: Routledge.

[6] A quasi-transcendental condition opposes the straightforward transcendental condition which is underscored by a desire for closures and thus sets the limits within which a thing or a phenomenon might appear and be read in a seemingly straightforward manner. A quasi-transcendental condition, on the other hand, is both the condition of possibility and impossibility of a thing to be read. It is a field without closure and it resists closures, allowing instead for dissemination, deferrals and *differance*. Drucilla Cornell, for example, argues that because the establishment of any system, in her case, the

But before I move on, to preempt any misunderstanding, I want to emphasize that the 'blindness' and the writing in the dark that Derrida speaks of in his text does not relate to a physical blindness or to a literal physical infirmity of the eye. Instead, what is signaled by Derrida's metaphor of blindness and invisibility, and his discussion of the draftsperson's act of drawing, is the kind of blindness the draftsperson encounters when she directs her gaze from the model/the thing to the canvas. Between the thing and the copy, there is an invisibility that the draftsperson has to traverse in order to draw. Into this space, there is no sight, an invisibility, the trait not yet traced retreats. Derrida indicates, 'the trait must proceed in the night. It escapes the field of vision [...] because it is not yet visible' (Derrida, 1993a: 48).

This concluding chapter will pick up on these themes of blindness, invisibility and the writing in the dark that has been provoked by *Memoirs of the Blind.* It will continue and expand on the thread picked up in the last chapter which is the theme of indecipherability, of incommensurability-vision. But to better think about how the radical alterity of the Other, an Other who is moreover indecipherable, relates to both our blindness and to our writing in the dark, this chapter will turn to another TheatreWorks performance, that is, the Singaporean production of *Lear.* In using *Lear* as a lever of intervention, what will be offered is a series of interwoven readings that will not only continue but expand on what I have come to term the politics of the invisible.

As a performance-as-critical-thought *in its own right*, *Lear* exemplifies postcolonial aesthetic practices that have come to place in the foreground an active dialogue with the conceptual framework and problematics that postcolonial theorists have delineated. Issues that are of typical concern in postcolonial aesthetic practices often interrogate and re-assess notions such as postcolonial subjectivity, community, gender, sexuality and ideas of 'belonging'. While performances such as

---

legal system implies a beyond to it and because the system does not fully respond and conform to the ethical relation to the Other, the law is deconstructible whereas Justice is not. Justice is the excess to the system. While the deconstructibility of law allows or opens up the space for reinterpretation and legal reforms, Justice is the 'not-yet' and the 'to-come', beyond calculability and terminality and aspires to an infinite responsibility to the Other and otherness. Justice, for Cornell, is irreducible and something to which we aspire to in order to be just to Justice. As I understand it, the undeconstructibility of Justice requires us, in short, to write in the dark even as we open ourselves to the Beyond and to the unimaginable transformative possibilities to come in the name of Justice.

TheatreWorks' productions of *Desdemona* and *Lear* bear witness to the process and the agonistic work of subjectivity being performed, what is undoubtedly foregrounded via their aesthetic practices is the possibility of imagining and knowing ourselves differently. While what is often expressed is the desire to imagine subjectivities differently, to imagine the Other differently, nonetheless, what is also performed is the acknowledgement that these questions are irreducible.

But for the purposes of this chapter, I want to highlight how, as a lever of intervention, TheatreWorks' *Lear* facilitates a politically disposed reading practice and a speculation on the ways in which certain moments of alterity in *Lear*'s representational spaces perform resistances to the politics of the visible.[7] To dwell on *Lear* as the 'positive lever' is not to designate *Lear* as the sole master key that will unlock the ultimate 'truth' about the politics of the invisible. Because the chapter is exploratory and not to be considered exhaustive, I wish to avoid totalizing or thematizing gestures on speculations of the politics of the invisible. Indeed, to speculate, derived from the Latin *specula*, a watch tower and *specere*, meaning to look, involves a transaction that also engages in, and acknowledges, the risk of loss. Using *Lear* as the 'positive lever' facilitates a speculation of the dimensions inherent in the practices of invisibility especially its link to 'the political'. This chapter suggests that, as a performance, the irreducible ambiguity of the Younger Daughter's silence, as a cryptic Other, performs a resistance to the political desire for closures that seek to cohere and support identity-securing practices.

In terms of 'the political', the postcolonial performances explored in the thesis are suggestive of a politics that disrupt or resist hasty closures and prescriptive determinations, aspiring instead to exceed the present horizon of visibilities in the name of an affirmative undecidability. In the last chapter, I suggest that TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* exemplifies a performance-as-critique of the

---

[7] See Spivak (1997) on her reference to the strategic use of the 'positive lever': 'If in the process of deciphering a text in the traditional way we come across a word that seems to harbor an unresolvable contradiction, and by virtue of being *one* word is made sometimes to work one way and sometimes in another and thus us made to point away from the absence of a unified meaning, we shall catch at that word. If a metaphor seems to suppress its implications, we shall catch at that metaphor. We shall follow its adventures through the text and see the text coming undone as a structure of concealment, revealing its self-transgression, its undecidability' (Spivak, 1997: lxxv). In the case of the politics of the invisible as the 'positive lever', the term also alerts us to the questions, the unexpected difficulties and the moments of undecidability encountered in attempting to follow the 'adventures' of the term through the performance of *Lear*.

Singaporean brand of multiculturalism. As a performance of the inoperative community, *Desdemona* puts into question the visibility politics of Singaporean multiculturalism which works to contain contingency and Otherness through the political management of alterity and heterogeneity. By assembling an alternative re-figuration of the community of the 'We', I suggested that *Desdemona* exemplifies an aspect of the practices of the invisible, which is the apophaticism of poetics.

What *Desdemona* performance-as-critique indicates is that 'the political' has been subsumed by and made synonymous with the sovereign gaze of 'the state' of Singapore which has obscured those moments or events of affirmative undecidability, foreclosing the event of the political even as it determines the presencing of the national fantasy of security and subjectivity that is determined by multicultural enframements. Indeed, in an act of inclusive exclusion, such enframements secure the inside even while they constitute the outside of the enframement. As Michael Dillon remarked, 'securing something requires its differentiation, classification and definition. It has, in short, to be identified' (Dillon, 1990-91: 101-24).

Indeed, both this chapter and the preceding one explore postcolonial performances that characterize the 'art of the perhaps'. While Chapter 3 considered the example of *Desdemona*'s performance of the inoperative community, this present chapter takes a step back and uses the performance of *Lear* as a didactic aid to consider the wider political assumptions underpinning our reading practices when we encounter the alterity of the Other. While Chapter 3 used *Desdemona* to study the politics of identity-securing practices in Singapore, this chapter proposes instead to look at the bigger picture. It explores the other aspect of the politics of the invisible, namely its relationship to a writing in the dark entailed by the alterity of the Other. Undoubtedly, as a radical relation with the radically non-relational, this writing in the dark is associated with the problems posed to reading when we encounter the challenge posed by the alterity of the Other. Should we, for example, always see the postcolonial subject-in-formation as an Other to the Same and as a deposition of identity? Whatever the strategies postcolonial artists and performers engage in, regardless of how intricate, should we always desire to see their work as a political struggle for identity and representation? What if the Other resists easy reading and

information-retrieval? Should we then produce our own meaning constructions of the identity of the Other? Would not this produce a reductive politics of identity, spelling a return to the politics of the visible, and thereby suppressing the interrogation of our own constructions and desires? By fetishising identity we promote a criticism that aspires to locate but instead only labels. The issues I raise in this chapter with regard to the problem of reading the alterity of the Other, represented by the silence of the Younger Daughter, is transferable to the wider political implications of how 'I' or 'We', engage with the challenge posed by the alterity of the Other, who by definition resists easy reading. This chapter problematises the possibility, and impossibility, of firstly, our reading practices of the Other. Secondly, it argues that our desire for a readability, linked to the demand to reduce the Other's otherness to our horizon of visibility, should instead involve examining the governing assumptions underlying such critical enterprises.

This chapter deepens the discussion begun in Chapter 3 about the politics of the invisible by suggesting that certain moments in the representational space of *Lear* open the 'call' to an impossible reading of Otherness, an Otherness which is by definition the invisible Other to the system and therefore resists readability. My reading of *Lear* will dwell on the wider political implications underlying the questions that the indecipherability of the Younger Daughter's silence raises. This 'call' to the Other, introduced by the Silent Younger Daughter, is the call to a politically disposed reading of the Other's otherness that is responsive and responsible to Otherness. But this 'call' to and by the Other also relates to the wider issue, the politics of the invisible. Such a politics, as I hope to demonstrate, demands a writing in the dark. But such a writing, as will be illustrated, also introduces us to the 'art of the perhaps'. As I will briefly discuss, this politically disposed reading that responds to the 'call' of the Other is associated to the 'call' to the Beyond, and makes possible the future to come and a Justice to come.

The Politics of the Invisible and the Political

The gift that *Lear* gives to me is a way of approaching a thinking of 'the political' particularly in reference to how this is linked to the practice of the invisible, a writing in blindness. *Lear* allows me the space, and the point of departure, with which to approach a thinking of the otherness of the Other in all its singularity. Precisely how this relates to thinking the political, the singularity of the Other in all its otherness (*toute autre est tout autre*) allows me to ponder what is at stake when we think the opposite, the opposite being the politics of the visible. As a practice of politics, the politics of the visible is a form of eschatology, a practice of finitude. It relates to, simply put, a metaphysics of closure. Simon Critchley, for example, argues that for Derrida, 'Being itself is inherently eschatological' (Critchley, 1992: 83) and is a form of metaphysical closure. For Derrida, as Critchley explains, Being itself is complicitous with teleology in which a self-conscious, self-coinciding subject delimits the boundaries of what is and what is not, which is characterized by a logocentrism associated with the desire for closures. In terms of the politics of the visible as eschatology, this would mean the question of setting out in advance the meaning or the essence of ultimate or last things such as 'God', 'Man', *telos*, death. As a form of politics, the practice of the visible as politics is associated with the limit condition as a 'determinable and determining terminus' (Dillon, 1996: 31) and sets in advance the conditions of possibility to advance a determinable and definitive readability. Such a politics sets the limits and the horizon within which a thing or a phenomenon might be read in a seemingly straightforward manner. As a practice of the visible, this form of politics becomes a form of eschatology: 'politics thought in the light of last things, the limit situation as determining and determinable terminus. But because eschatology is ineluctably linked also, through diverse idioms (essence, cause, *teleos* and revelation) to the beginning of things, this terminus also articulates the natality, the first cause, the ultimate goal, defining essence or revelatory initiation and fulfillment of the political as well' (Dillon, 1996: 31).

A politics of the visible as eschatology specifies the ends, the limits and the conditions of possibility in advance for the emergence of phenomenon. Specifying the conditions in advance determines at the same time the readability of such phenomenon. Supposed in advance by the politics of the visible are firstly, regimes and institutionalizations of knowledge that decide and calculate in a prescriptive force

the limit condition in terms of terminality and calculability and secondly, the determination and re-conception of the specular subject as self-conscious, self-coinciding subject. But suppressed nonetheless in the politics of the visible as eschatology is the evacuation of the trace of the Other, and the suppression of different modes of being in the world, of alternate forms of political engagements and representations. In contrast to the politics of the visible as eschatology, which spells a prescription of the limit condition, the politics of the invisible that *Lear* allows me to ponder refers broadly to a 'writing in the dark', to a passion of/for the impossible. For Derrida, to write without seeing, to write in the dark or in blindness requires a faith and a passion for the Other, disclosing a passion for the impossible.[8] A writing in the dark is akin to a writing in blindness, a writing from one unknowable position addressed at the same time to the unknowability and 'un-forseeability' and hence, the invisibility of the Other to come. Blindness and invisibility constitutes our acts of writing in the dark and is the condition of possibility that holds out the possibility for our be-coming otherwise. This form of 'the political', as a practice of the invisible, which visibility politics have suppressed in its desire for readability, is conditioned by a desire for the impossible Other to come. Such a desire emerges from the blindness that accompanies the 'art of the perhaps' and co-ordinates other possibilities and potentialities of different modes of the otherwise of being. The impossible is the condition and conditions desire. The impossible, for Derrida, conditions and stirs our desire and is structured round faith. As a practice of the political, this desire for the

---

[8] By the impossible, I do not take Derrida to mean the erection of a barrier or a limit for to do so would be to enact another form of closure. Also by the impossible, I do not take Derrida to mean the not-possible or non-possible. For Derrida, the passion for the impossible relates to *l'inventions de l'autre*, the in-coming of an other that is unforeseeable. The invisibility of the Other, for Derrida, is other to the present system This passion for the impossible Other to-come underlies the blindness in which we must write. But this blindness also enacts a politics of the invisible that keep us open to innumerable and incalculable possibilities and different modes of being otherwise. For example, for Derrida, this passion for the impossible also relates to the way we think about the future and the present especially as 'living present is scarcely as self-sufficient as it claims to be; that we could do well not to count on its density and solidity, which might under exceptional error betray us' (Derrida, 1994: 38-9). To be other to the present, a future to be worthy of its name, cannot be a future present as this future would be merely be the prescription of a plannable, programmable future of the present but depends instead on the impossibility of knowing and calculability. According to Hamacher (1999), for Derrida, the future is the absolute other: 'The promise of an absolute other future testifies to hope in even the bloodiest pasts. To make other futures possible, they must undergo the risk of their pairing with dangerous futures and confront their own effacement.' (Hamacher, 1999: 197). On this count, the passion for the impossible underwrites what Comell has termed 'the philosophy of the limit', not as delimitation but as moving to the beyond of the calculable and prescriptive. The impossible, on this reading, is a way of thinking and disposition to the beyond, to the Other which is unthinkable in advance and which is without an ontic mask. For Hamacher (1999), this thinking at and beyond the limits and about the impossible means that this 'can neither be an object of knowledge nor of perception, and only precisely it evades the controls of both perception and knowledge' (Hamacher, 1999: 182).

impossible is also a 'desire for the invisible'[9] and provokes the agonal querying of the limits imposed by the eschatological politics of the visible. But as a form of eschatological desire, this desire for the invisible is also opposed to totalitarian modes of thinking and relating to Otherness. Construed here as a form of eschatological desire, the politics underpinning the practices of the visible are compelled by questioning the limits defined by politics, opening instead non-eschatological responses to the imposed limits that delimit our pluralized modes of being in the world and our ethical engagement with the Other(s).

In terms of the overall organization of the chapter, the next section will give some background by providing a general description of TheatreWorks *Lear.* It also briefly delineates the critical reception to *Lear.* This is followed by the next section 'Reading Silence, Approaching the Other' where I consider what insights can be drawn from *Lear* in terms of the politics of the invisible and what it illuminates about 'the political'. By conducting a politically disposed reading of *Lear*, I ask how does one approach the alterity of the Other? How does one 'read' the alterity of Other who remains stubbornly indecipherable? In terms of the politics of the visible, what are the implications if one renders the Other readable? I attempt to highlight the problematic of these questions via a politically disposed reading of the Silent Younger Daughter in *Lear.* In doing so, I also ask what if the most challenging aspect of politics performed in *Lear* lie not in the overt, visible aspects of its production. What if the most challenging aspect of this performance lies in the instances of indecipherability, an Otherness that remains inaccessible and undecidable. Such is the ambiguity of the Other, the invisible other to the system, that my and our desires for definitive explanations, for ready-made comprehension and for identity constructions are derailed. In the conclusion, I briefly consider how this writing in the dark is linked to the 'art of the perhaps'. As will soon be obvious, the art of the perhaps is another name for the politics of the undecidable, which is not the politics of despair or nihilism. Instead, this affirmative undecidability is the condition of possibility introduced by the challenge of radical alterity. As a writing in the dark, the affirmation of the Other's otherness insists that we move beyond the fossilizations of identity representations associated with the politics of the visible.

---

[9] See '*Desire for the Invisible*' in Levinas (1994a).

TheatreWorks' *Lear*: A preamble

By providing the wider context and a broad description of TheatreWorks *Lear*, this section lays down the groundwork for the next section where I provide a politically disposed reading of the silence of the Younger Daughter. This section is to be understood as the enabling point of departure that will aid me to move on to conduct that reading, especially the insights into the practice of the invisible.

Why *Lear*? This question has been frequently asked of Ong Keng Sen, the director of the performance, by his Singaporean critics who have queried the deliberate choice of a cultural product of the West. As Bharucha (2000: 27) suggests, the issue for Ong Keng Sen, the director of the performance, was not the universality of Shakespeare but its "'neutrality', in the sense that no theatre culture from Asia could 'claim' Shakespeare on their own grounds". Indeed, the play was selected for intercultural work because of this 'neutrality' and therefore 'outside all of the participating cultures', giving Ong Keng Sen and his pan-Asian, intercultural cast the opportunity to explore issues such as cultural negotiation, subjectivity, sexuality, gender and community (Bharucha, 2000: 23-30).

TheatreWorks' *Lear* received its Japanese premier in 1997 in Tokyo and its Singaporean premiere in January 1999 in Kallang Theatre, Singapore. Funded and commissioned by the Japan Foundation Asia Centre, the multi-million dollar production has since toured Hong Kong, Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka, Jakarta and Perth. The project brought together artists, performers and musicians from China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand and wove together diverse performance art-forms and musical traditions from the six Asian countries.

Both Ong Keng Sen and Rio Kishida rejected a direct translation-adaptation of the play, favoring instead to hold on to the 'barest of story of the original play'. In their version, there isn't a Lear figure. Lear appears and is named instead as the Old Man who is played by the Japanese master Noh actor, Umewaka Naohiko. As Rio Kishida, the Japanese feminist playwright, indicates: 'I didn't think the existence of the "King" was necessary, that's why the title is just Lear [...] Even in the script, there isn't a "Lear" character, he appears as the Old Man'. Goneril and Regan are reduced into the sole figure of the Elder Daughter, performed by a male Beijing opera singer,

Jiang Qihu. Cordelia is performed by the widely acclaimed Thai classical dancer Peeramon Chomdhavat, and in the TheatreWorks' version, she is rendered as the mostly silent Younger Daughter. The action of the performance constellates around these three protagonists. What emerges in their performance is a critical dialogue about the desire for power, the struggle with the weight of cultural and traditional authority and history and the search for freedom. Despite charges of cultural essentialism in which Noh theatre is used to evoke the age and dignity of the Old Man, Chinese Opera to capture the flamboyance of the Elder Daughter and Thai dance to evoke the silent subject-position of the Silent Daughter, it is not my intention here to dwell on the production and the dramaturgy of the performance, which has been described as 'intercultural'. Indeed, intercultural work, problematic as such, has been constantly open to constant critiques and accusations.[10] Suffice it to state in passing that critics have argued that the correspondences drawn between the different Asian cultural and theatrical forms, including the characterizations of its key players, have foregrounded essentialist and essentialising qualities about Asians.[11]

In its critical reception, critics such as Richard Saludo (1999), Phan Ming Yen (1999) and Nicanor Tiongson (1997) have indicated that in rejecting a mere translation-adaptation, Ong Keng Sen and Rio Kishida have produced yet another difficult intercultural performance that weaves together the diverse Asian performance-art forms and traditions of six Asian countries (Japanese Noh, Beijing Opera, Sumatran martial arts *panchak silat* and Indonesian *gamelan* among others). In addition, a

---

[10] For Pavis, for example, intercultural theatre draws upon and mixes different performance traditions (both Eastern and Western) creating a hybridization in which the original form is no longer distinguishable (Pavis, 1996). However, Pavis also argues that, whatever the strategy or form that this interculturalism might take, such interactions and exchanges imply a theory and an ethics of alterity in which one engages with the Other, however problematic that engagement is. And while intercultural theatre is often used to describe the work of Peter Brook's his adaptation of Eastern aesthetics for the Western stage, intercultural theatre also describes the opposite process, in which Indian, Chinese or Japanese directors and dramatists mix Western dramaturgy with their own codified theatrical and performance traditions. A particular form of intercultural theatre found in former colonies often integrate elements of their own performance traditions with that of Western Euro-American forms of theatre. For Indian theorist-director Rustom Bharucha however, the intercultural theatre is a form of cultural intervention and practice, a way of promoting secularism as an alternative to the communalism and fundamentalisms in India (Bharucha, 2000). In addition, Bharucha states that intercultural theatrical practice could serve as another form of cultural colonialism in which Asia is reduced to a cultural repository of raw materials for the cultural products of the West (Bharucha, 1993). For various critiques of intercultural theatre, and the continuing debates about its differences from other theatrical forms such as syncretic theatre, intracultural theatre, a good starting point would be Pavis (1996).

[11] For these criticisms, see for example, Bharucha (2000) and Lee Weng Choy (1999) in Bharucha (2000).

variety of Asian languages (Japanese, Mandarin, Thai, Bahasa Indonesia) are spoken in *Lear*, ensuring that the performers spoke or sung in the languages corresponding to their own respective performance traditions and geographical locations. This rejection of monolingualism ensures that no one spectator could understand all the languages used in *Lear*, serving only to heighten the processes of defamiliarisation. Like *Desdemona*, the intercultural production of *Lear* brought together a team of actors, performers, musicians and choreographers from different Asian countries in November 1996 as participants in TheatreWorks *Flying Circus Project* where it was workshoped and scripted by Rio Kishida and Ong Keng Sen and produced by Yuki Hata of the Japan Foundation Asia Centre. The performance thus emerged from a series of intercultural, collaborative effort and 'cultural negotiations' as Ong Keng Sen puts it. In terms of its intercultural negotiations and hybridization, Saludo (1999) indicates that 'this creative interaction can serve as a metaphor for how unity and cooperation can arise from the ethnic diversity of Asia' (Saludo, 1999: 40).

In Kishida's spare script, *Lear* begins with the ghostly figure of the Old Man emerging from the shadows onto a largely monochromatic and austere space devoid of colour, props or any other materials, lit only by a simple lighting overhead. As Komparu (1983: 77-78) notes, Rio Kishida, the Japanese playwright, was drawn to the phantasmal qualities of Noh theatre. In the opening scene, she creates a prologue in which a Troubadour sings about the voices and memories of the dead while the spectral figure of the Old Man emerges slowly from the shadows. The Troubadour sings: '[...] ghosts of people who are long dead [...] voices of people who met unhappy ends' intoning finally 'at the end of the road of death, there is a door to life'. The Old Man, wearing a Japanese mask, slowly takes centre stage. His first words, in the mode of Japanese Noh theatre, are: 'Who am I? I was sleeping the sleep of the dead...I was tormented by a nightmare I cannot remember'. He continues, 'Who was I long ago?' The Elder Daughter, performed by a male Beijing Opera singer, and dressed flamboyantly in the costume of a Beijing opera singer, is the next one to emerge from the shadows. She sings in Mandarin: 'Father ....You are my Father' to which he replies: 'What is a Father?' The Younger Daughter is the next one to emerge from the shadows. She is dressed, or rather he is dressed, in the costume of a classical Thai dancer. In *Lear*, it should be noted that many borders are crossed

and negotiated. Such borders are crossed firstly, and notably, in terms of gender passing, and secondly, in the negotiation of languages. Because of its intercultural process, a variety of performance traditions and styles are also crossed. The Younger Daughter is largely silent in the performance, and her androgynous character is evoked in the lyrical, sinuous movements of classical Thai Dance. The Younger Daughter is introduced to the Old Man by the Elder Daughter who says: 'This is your younger daughter – the leftover dredges of your love. She is always silent. No one knows what she is scheming in her mind. Father ...it was you who created me and sister, and also this country, so you are the King'. However, the Old Man remains perplexed as to his identity and seems lost. He asks 'Was I king? What is a King?' In order to discover who he is, he leaves his court in the hands of the Elder Daughter, who promises him her absolute loyalty, while he is away. But, in the course of the performance, we realize that she does not mean to keep to this promise, plotting instead to usurp the Old Man's position. Meanwhile, the Silent Younger Daughter utters not a word to the Old Man even though he repeatedly demands it of her. Before he leaves, he banishes her: 'What are your words? Your silence denotes endless darkness. I banish you my daughter....You are no longer my daughter'. However, as soon as the Old Man departs, the Elder Daughter, with the help of her retainers, usurps the throne. She rejoices by singing in Mandarin: 'Words expressed in promises vanish in smoke. What a foolish old man not to realize that! And how stupid you are to believe silence is a virtue. Words are weapons! They are the only means of survival. I have won. I have won with words!' The Younger Daughter is left alone on stage. The lights dim and darkness falls on the stage with only a solitary spotlight thrown on her.

The next scene opens with the phantom of the Mother, who is performed again by Noh performer Umewaka Naohiko in another gender-passing role. She, or rather he, approaches centre stage. He, Umewaka Naohiko appears on stage as the Absent Mother against a red backdrop and is dressed in a white Noh costume. Meanwhile, an elaborate throne is pushed onto centre stage with the Elder Daughter seated in it. But she, the Absent Mother is also spurned by the Elder Daughter with the words, expressed in the mode of Beijing opera: 'Get lost! [...] Not a single drop of your blood flows inside me. Only my father's blood flows in my veins. Only the King's blood'.

The next scene that follows opens with the Old Man returning from his travels. He approaches the throne on which the Elder Daughter is sitting. But his path is blocked by her retainers and he soon learns that he has being usurped, he is disempowered. The next scene that follows opens with the Elder Daughter and together with her Loyal Retainer; they plot the murder of the Old Man. The Younger Daughter finally breaks her silence and pleads with her sister on his behalf, asking her to spare his life. But in a fit of jealous rage, on account that she has spoken, the Elder Daughter sings in enraged tones, 'Words! You have used words! You have used words to tell me what to do!' proceeding with the help of her Retainer, in a terrifying scene, to murder her sister, the Silent Younger Daughter. This scene is followed by a series of other bloody scenes. Firstly, the Old Man's Loyal Attendant, played by veteran Singaporean actor, Lim Yu Beng, has his eyes gouged out by the Elder Daughter, following his unsuccessful attempt to plea on the Old Man's behalf: 'The King...now he is an old man. Seeing is his only pleasure. Seeing is his only wish. Please leave the old man alone...You are now the one who occupies the throne. You are the ruler'. But, the Elder Daughter rejects his plea, singing in Mandarin, in the mode of the performance tradition of the Beijing Opera: 'If seeing is the Old Man's pleasure, I will seize even that. My retainer, dig out the loyal attendant's eyes!' Meanwhile, as this scene is occurring, the Elder Daughter's many loyal retainers crawl, tumble and creep sinuously across the largely monochromatic and dimly lit staging, in the mode of the Indonesian martial arts form of *panchak silat.*

In the next scene, we witness the Elder Daughter sensing her own Retainer's secret ambition for power. Her next brutal act is the beheading of her own Retainer. The Old Man, in another scene change, is haunted by the brutal acts he had committed in the past. He laments in Japanese, in the mode of Noh theatre: 'When I close my eyes, voices flow into the recesses of my soul. The voices of people who have died. The voices of people who met unhappy ends. Life was interrupted...Seeds of endless resentment'. Following this, the next scene opens with the Old Man, inspired by the phantom of his wife, attempting to reason with the Elder Daughter but to no avail. As Indonesian *gamelan* music plays in the background, she drives a sword into the Old Man, saying: 'Killing you, I have become myself. From today onwards I shall become my own ruler'. But, in decimating everyone to gain access to the throne, the Elder Daughter, in the closing scene of the performance, lit overhead with a solitary

spotlight, finds that she is alone. She sits on the empty stage, asking repeatedly: 'I am alone....Who is behind me? Who is behind me?' As Jiang Qihu, a performer in *Lear*, puts it, 'When she gets everything, she realizes that she has lost everything'. As the lights dim, the specter of the Mother appears in the background of the staging. The Mother approaches the Elder Daughter from the shadows and embraces her. The solitary spotlight turns on them, gradually getting brighter before fading gently away to leave the performers in the dark. In an interview, Ong Keng Sen stated that, for him, the Mother represents a symbol of redemption. Moreover, in closing the scene with an embrace, Ong in an interview, stated that he wanted to leave the resolution of this moment ambiguous by deliberately leaving a question mark hanging over the possibility of the redemption and salvation.

Lear is undoubtedly an intercultural performance that negotiates cultural, linguistic and gender borders. According to Yuki Hata, *Lear* was 'not a showcase for different cultures but a collaboration – a dialogue [...] as a family sharing a destination'. Likewise, Dick Lee, a Singaporean musician involved in the staging of *Lear*, has also described the work of this intercultural experiment as an exemplar of 'love and respect for each other's culture and traditions'. However, several critics have noted that *Lear* is underscored by a social, political and historical language and commentary on Asian society. Tiongson (1997) has, for example, indicated that the performance 're-evaluates the patriarchy in the Asian family, community and nation, raising questions about its validity and continuing presence in contemporary society and culture' (Tiongson, 1997: 65). Critics have also noted the prioritization of gender in the performance piece. In an interview, Ong explicitly states that he 'was playing around with gender and looking at the female character as a symbol of New Asia and how the New Asian tackles a patriarchal system, how he or she interfaces, confront or negotiates with a patriarchal system' (Phan, 1999: 12) which has been referred to as the 'Politics of Patricide' by Bharucha (2000: 38) represented by the murder of the father by the Elder Daughter. Ong Keng Sen, the director of the performance, has emphasized however, that, for him, *Lear* is the paradigmatic text in which the New Asia, represented by the figure of the Elder Daughter, kills the father only to become like him. But, the Elder Daughter, in killing her father, is also haunted by the ghosts of the past. As Ong Keng Sen suggests in an interview, she 'struggles with the weight of history, cultural identity and heritage. But, she, the Elder Daughter

nonetheless becomes exactly like her father and so it means she is also unable to run away from her cultural identity [...] I think this piece deals with the longing to break away from a system, an old system, but, unfortunately, we are so imbued with the system that we become the fathers for the next generation' (Phan, 1999: 13-14).

The inevitable question arises, and it is one that has already been asked by Bharucha himself: 'Has the cycle of *karma* been disrupted by the killing of the father, or has it been perpetuated?' and more crucially, "Can a 'New Asia' rise phoenix-like from the ashes of older regimes, or will the specters of Lee Kuan Yew, among other political father-figures, continue to reign in different manifestations?" (Bharucha, 2000: 38). It is a question that I, as a postcolonial subject of Singapore, have also asked myself and similarly, it is a question that has continued to haunt Ong Keng Sen and Bharucha. But the question remains: 'can we ever free ourselves from the cultural, historical, and political baggage of the past? Or in killing our fathers, do we simply become like them, perpetuating our own self-destruction?' Indeed, how do 'I', how do 'We', the postcolonial subjects, turn towards and affirm the Other to come even as we acknowledge the colonial inscriptions of that traumatic past, even as we acknowledge the phallogocentrism of the present decolonized postcolonial Singaporean space? Rather pessimistically, Ong Keng Sen has suggested that 'we kill our fathers only to become like them.' However, given that this chapter represents an exploration of the politic lurking within the practices of the invisible, I want to emphasize that this present study is not the place that will take up a detailed reading of the 'Politics of Patricide' and the rise of New Asia mediated through the role played by the woman.

Before I move on to exploring how a reading of the Silent Younger Daughter in *Lear* introduces us to the interrelated question of the politics of the invisible and a writing in the dark, I want to re-emphasize that it is not my intention in this chapter to dwell on a reading that draws analogies between the 'innate qualities' of the different Asian art forms and the characters themselves. Nor is it my aim here to dwell on the intercultural dramaturgy of TheatreWorks' various intercultural productions and its relationship to other forms of intercultural experiments such as Peter Brooks' problematic and widely criticized intercultural production of *The Mahabharata* which

other critics have drawn homologies to.[12] Neither will this chapter seek to counterpose a reading of TheatreWorks intercultural translation and re-articulation of *Lear* with that of the original European text itself.

Instead, for the purposes here, I explore how the figure of the Silent Daughter problematises the reading of and hence our approach to Otherness. By conducting a politically disposed reading of the Silent Younger Daughter, I ask: how do we approach the Other in all its otherness and singularity? How do we approach the indecipherability of the Other who awaits us at the limits of our knowledge and understanding? As Bharucha argues, 'what matters instead is the resonance of the performance' (2000: 31) and 'since everyone reads, acts, writes with his or her ghosts, even when one goes after the ghost of the other' (Derrida, 1994: 139), what resonates is the conflictual economy of desire and power, of the power and desire for visibility and the potency of retaining invisibility witnessed in the cryptic silence of the Younger Daughter. Whether or not this particular interpretive strategy exists or was intended by the director of the performance, Ong Keng Sen, it is still necessary, even crucial to pursue this exploration of the silence of the Younger Daughter, particularly in terms of what it spells out for an understanding of the politics of the invisible.

Reading the work of the political in TheatreWorks' *Lear*: Reading Silence, Approaching the Other

> Perhaps it is my autopoiesis as a woman that demands that I begin with difference, the future, and Justice, because the "present" of this social system and legal system is profoundly threatening to women.
>
> Drucilla Cornell

On two separate occasions, I have returned to Singapore interviewing performers and cultural critics involved in the Singaporean performance scene, rooting around in the archives of TheatreWorks, the National Archives of Singapore as well as the

---

[12] For such a critique, see for example Bharucha (1993).

National Library of Singapore. As a result, pages of notes were generated in an effort to understand how contemporary performances in Singapore enact the politics of a 'counter-gaze' to those official politics that attempt to enact, through the politics of closures, identity-securing discourses. The performance scene in Singapore is one of the most overt examples of embodied resistances to the dominant ideological modes of authority and power that cohere around identity-securing discourses and they often disrupt, resist or intervene in these dominant discourses. However, upon my first encounter with *Lear* and *Desdemona* in the archives of TheatreWorks, I began to ask myself: what if the most challenging, the most subversive aspect of the politics articulated in these performances are not the overt, visible aspects of the production. Instead, I ask myself, what if the most subversive aspects of these performances are those instances that resist decipherability, easy explanations and ready-made comprehension? What if, in eluding the consistency of organized discourse, in eluding calculability, this invisibility is by the same token unreadable, particularly 'if by readability one means an intelligibility that can be transported elsewhere, [...] readable once its identity is firmly established that one can translate it, transfer it, transport it' (Derrida, 1995: 388)? What if those determined silences, such as the silence of the Younger Daughter in *Lear* and the indecipherability of *Desdemona*, instances that derail easy translations, disrupting categories and resisting the quick readiness of the interpretive gaze of the reader/spectator are the most subversive and challenging aspects of these performances? Moreover, in a double bind, how do we approach the silence of the Silent Daughter who eludes the interpretive gaze of the reader. By being enclosed a cryptic silence, the temptation that faces the reader, as specular subject, is to understand her, to *get her to speak*, which is also a process of intervention that makes the politics of the reader's position transparent.

As I have suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, underlying the practices of the visible is a political and proprietorial disposition toward Otherness, suggestive of an imperialistic politics of mastery. For example, in Chapter 2, I suggest how colonial visibility politics partake in a violent metaphysical sovereign politics wherein the colonial 'I' is secured as Subject and Sovereign, thus partaking in the identity-formulation of I Am Who I Am. In Chapter 3, I suggest that postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism exemplifies another form of visibility politics. Suggestive of this form of visibility

politics is a multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference by which the 'We' are homogenized into the totality of Sameness of the 'We' of the multicultural community, a politics in which alterity is erased and homogeneity disavowed. Implicit then in this form of visibility politics is a community-securing practice coordinated by rational calculability and the affirmation of unconditioned perceptual certainty. Lurking, then, in the politics of the visible is a desire for securing rational cognition, the onto-theologic desire to know and to be absolutely. Indeed, this is transferable to how we relate to Otherness while avoiding the temptations of wanting to reduce Otherness to the economy of the Same. Of course, letting the Other be Other in all its Otherness is no easy task. As specular subjects, our desire for readability also extends to an insistence on visibility, including knowability and speech from someone. And this also means that we, in our insistence on visibility and definitive knowability, enframe and make the object of investigation knowable, nameable and hence, translatable and securable. As a form of visibility politics, this type reading practice is also a form of political disposition. Such a politics can be understood as a practice of determining the possible as the only possible, calculable possible. The political, on the other hand, as a practice of eschatological desire, as a radical openness to the Other's otherness, is expressed as an acknowledgement for the Beyond, associated with the desire to move beyond the limit condition imposed by the politics of the visible, a politics understood as terminality and calculability. As a practice of eschatological desire, this understanding of the political differs from onto-theological desire which is a practice of politics emanating from lack. In other words, as I have attempted to indicate throughout, the practice of the visible, as a form of politics, is underlined by a desire that is often expressed as a will to knowledge, as a desire to be and to know absolutely. In contrast, a reading practice that is coordinated by the politics of the invisible is opened to the irreducible ambiguity posed by the alterity of the Other. As a form of eschatological desire, and because it eschews lack, this form of politics is akin to Derrida's deconstruction, and is characterized by an openness to the experience of the impossible as the only possible experience. Indeed, lurking within and charging eschatological desire is the ethical desire to enact the ethical relation to Otherness. Thus construed, eschatological desire, as a form of writing in blindness refers to a desire for the Beyond of experience, for the impossible of experience. As a practice of the political, eschatological desire, as a form of writing in blindness, signals a desire to move beyond the limits and closures imposed by politics, to

rethink other pluralized possibilities of Otherness and alternate forms of engagements with Otherness.[13]

But on encountering the ineffable silence of the Younger Daughter, I asked myself: what if those subversive instances of politics are articulated in those instances of silences that resists the interpretive drive and the will to knowledge? And if so, how do we even begin to approach an understanding of these determined silences, these invisibilities that resists the lustful gaze of the reader even while we are attentive to the pitfalls that accompany the desire to read and enframe these instances of 'silence' in the text within our own frame of discourse. In short, what has fascinated me in this chapter and Chapter 3 are those 'silences', those 'invisibilities' that, for me, are synonymous with those political projects that remain 'riskily underdefined' and which represent a 'suspension of the will to knowledge' (Berlant, 1994: 145).

This section explores the issue of indecipherability of the Younger Daughter's silence. I consider how the challenge posed to reading by the Younger Daughter's silence is linked to the wider problem of reading, which is the problem encountered when we attempt to 'read' the radical alterity of the Other. In considering how we approach and read the Other who is invisible and the Other to the system, I explore these interrelated questions: how does one read, if it is at all possible, the Other, who is embodied here in the Silent Younger Daughter's subject-positioning? In fact, this question is linked to other questions: how do we prepare to read and respond to the Other, when the only adequate preparation is the acknowledgement that we can never read the Other adequately? Is not the Other, in its Otherness, the one for whom one is precisely ill-equipped to read or comprehend? Would not the comprehensibility of the Other relieve the Other of his or her or its alterity, so that what occurs is not the Other but the Same and just what we were expecting? In inhabiting a position of invisibility, what does the alterity of the Other, represented by the unknowability of her silence, teach us in terms of how we think the politics of the

---

[13] The discussion of eschatological desire is also another name for Derrida's messianic eschatology. For Derrida, messianic eschatology is a disposition to the Beyond, unthinkable in advance, and is not an object of knowledge or perception and beyond the horizon of expectation. For example, this form of messianic eschatology includes a thinking about the Other, and is coordinated by the Other, in this case, the future to come, and is conditioned, Derrida writes, by an 'eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of a singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. Awaiting without the horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer [...] welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant*' (Derrida, 1994: 65).

invisible? These questions recall those earlier questions posed in the introduction to this chapter: how do we read and write in blindness? And because, according to Derrida (1993a), to the extent that we write, we are always writing in the blind and exceeding visibility, how do we then respond to the alterity of the Other who remains unknowable to us? Indeed, where do we begin especially when all these questions posed by the alterity of the Other stage instead aporias? The issue that this section, and this chapter as whole, is grappling with concerns the wider political ramifications with regard to what we can claim to know about the Other with any certainty. If we have learnt our lessons from Derrida, this is also related to the broader concern which is expressed as an unwillingness to surrender to the idea that there is in all instances a single, authoritative truth to be disclosed and defended particularly when the assertion of single and definitive truth claims about Others and Otherness would be politically suspect.

To begin to read the indecipherability posed by the Younger Daughter's silence calls for a politically disposed reading practice that attempts to respond and be responsible to Otherness. But I will also attempt to demonstrate through a politically disposed reading practice how this indecipherability highlights an aspect of the politics of the invisible. This reading practice, by drawing on the lessons of deconstruction, could be defined modestly as a politically disposed feminist reading practice that attempts to be responsive and responsible to the singularity of the Other and Otherness. Such a politically disposed reading practice also modestly aspires to an ethical reading practice. By a politically disposed ethical reading practice, I am indicating the engagement and negotiation with the Other in non-essential, non-violent terms, an ethical stance that makes room for the Other to exist in all its Otherness. Let it be noted that this chapter is not grappling with the critical debates in the philosophy of ethics. That is beyond the scope and parameters of this chapter.

In many ways, the indecipherability of the Younger Daughter's silence, and the reading practice that her silence entails, encourages a politics and an ethics of questioning that resists constative statements about the truth of her subject-positioning. Derrida, for example, highlights that it is the otherness of the Other,

notwithstanding its ultimate indecipherability, that *calls* for a reading practice.[14] But this reading is simultaneously possible and impossible on account of the irreducibility of Otherness. While Derrida argues that 'unreadability does not arrest reading, does not leave it paralyzed in the face of an opaque surface: rather, it starts reading and writing and translation moving again' (Derrida, 1979: 116), Derrida also indicates that the unreadability of a text refers to the 'impossibility of acceding to its proper significance and its possibly inconsistent content, which it jealously keeps back' (Derrida, 1992: 211). As he quite clearly states, this is the law of reading and in many ways, the thing itself, the Other, makes it impossible for reading to be mere deciphering as the thing itself can never be read or reduced to mere readability as it is continually deferred on account of the irreducibility of its Otherness. However, as we have also learnt from Derrida, a politically disposed reading that looks to deconstruction for a method cannot at the same time expect a tool box or a definitive methodology with which to be responsible and just to the Other.[15] The questions Derrida raises about the 'call' of the Other, like the questioning that accompanies the 'call' for a justice-to-come and a community-to-come, is unending, and as he states on several occasions, it is never fully answered and never fully calculable within the limits of our present-vision.

First let us turn to the Silent Daughter. Like *Desdemona*'s indecipherability, she is the other cryptic woman who continues to haunt this study. Undoubtedly, the Younger Daughter remembers and re-enacts both the colonial and postcolonial subalternisation and effacement of the Woman. On account of her unreadability and hence her invisibility, she is denied a place, banished to the outside by both her father and the Elder Daughter. This recalls what Derrida has said about the association of unreadability with that of the victim: 'you are right to associate this category of the unreadable with the value of the victim. One of the meanings of what is called a victim [...] is precisely to be erased in its meaning as victim. The absolute

---

[14] Yet the endlessness of reading entailed by the alterity of the Other also necessitates a critical vigilance and responsibility without programme whereby one is ineluctably involved in an ethics of reading. As J. Hillis Miller writes: "By the 'ethics of reading' [...] I mean that aspect of reading which is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my responsibility and for further effects [...] of my acts of reading" (Miller, 1987: 43).

[15] See for example, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' (Derrida, 1991).

victim cannot even protest [...] He or she is totally excluded or covered over by language, annihilated by history, a victim one cannot identify [...] But there is also the unreadability that stems from the violence of foreclosure, exclusion' (Derrida, 1995: 389). *Lear* and likewise *Desdemona* are repeated acts of 'rememoration' in that both performances are concerned with memory, reconstruction, reimagination and the refiguration of the role of the woman through the long and painful experience of subordination and suppression, the agonal search for power and security in freedom. As Rio Kishida, the Japanese playwright of *Lear*, indicates: 'In this play, I want to portray how women reclaim their identity and recover in this male dominated society. This is the main theme of the play'. This more obvious intended reading, that is, the Younger Daughter's silence as denoting the subject-positioning of a victim conforms to the critical reception of the performance. In their critical appraisal, critics and journalists have either focused on the Elder Daughter's subject-position and, as a result, ignored or glossed over the Younger Daughter's positioning in the performance or they have argued that her silence denotes only powerlessness.[16] Indeed, it has to be noted, it is interesting to see how these critical responses to her, the Younger Daughter, have also mirrored those responses by the Old Man and the Elder Daughter in the performance.

While I agree on the one hand that her subject-production in the performance remembers and re-enacts the colonial and post-colonial subalternisation of women, on the other hand, I want to suggest that the Younger Daughter's silence is ultimately impossible to read. Like the alterity of the Other, it remains cryptic. And I do not think it is possible to ascribe a single and definitive truth-claim to her silence because her silence remains indecipherable to us, especially if by decipherability one indicates the possibility of developing a definitive reading that aims to ascribe a transcendent truth to her subject-position. Like the Old Man and the Elder Daughter in the performance, can we demand or make silence speak? What is the unspoken saying? To what extent is dissimulation a way of speaking? Macherey highlights this problematic position particularly if we keep in mind the inevitable temptations to recuperate her identity and the 'proper significance' of the Silent Daughter's subject-position, which is undoubtedly an explicit and zealous missionary attempt to exorcise her of her silence and bring her into the light and visibility of knowledge:

---

[16] See for Bharucha (2000), Phan (1999), Saludo (1999) and Tiongson (1997).

> Can we make silence speak? What is the unspoken saying? What does it mean? To what extent is dissimulation a way of speaking? Can something that has hidden *itself* be recalled to our presence? Silence as the source of expression. Is what I am really saying what I am saying? Hence the main risk run by those who would say everything. After all, perhaps the work is not hiding what is does not say: this is simply missing. (Macherey, 1978: 86)

As a performance, while the Silent Daughter's subject-positioning foregrounds the very problem of 'reading' silence, it raises the other issue of how we 'read' or begin to approach an understanding of this silence while avoiding the temptations to ventriloquising her subject-position? While she, the Silent Younger Daughter, might exemplify the trace of colonial history's subalternisation of the Woman, yet we have to ask, is this not the prescription of a singular truth claim to her position? Her silence tempts us, in short, to demand speech, to recuperate her. But, as was suggested, she remains 'unreadable' especially if by readable one means a single, definitive interpretation. However, one has to ask, what are the political implications when we insists on ascribing a definitive truth to this Other, the Silent Younger Daughter or for that matter, any Other? To suggest the possibility of readability, namely, to reduce the significance of her silence to a single, definitive truth would be to name and thus reduce her to a properly, identifiable place which would be the performance of yet another form of violence. In her silence, the Silent Younger Daughter remains invisible, and hence, unknowable to the specular subject.

To be sure, what is indeed resonant is a certain identification with the two women, the Younger Daughter and the Elder Daughter. Mapped onto the war of positioning between two women is the performance of a critical dialogue. What is staged and foregrounded in their performance is the problematisation and vacillation between the desire for power and political visibility, and the desire for preserving the potency that inheres in invisible, underdefined and non-sovereign forms of subjectivities. The performance of a critical dialogue between the two women is an age-old one: surely there is power in remaining invisible and indecipherable? Surely there is some potency in remaining unmarked and unknowable? After all, is there not some potency, in terms of the politics of resistance, in eluding the presumption of the all-

knowing institutional gaze that attempts to delimit and enframe us into a safe and legible frame of discourse? Further, in their performance of a critical dialogue, the questions posed by the two women's binarised subject-positionings is this: what do we lose if we reject political legibility? In the Elder Daughter's seizure of power, we are confronted with the questions associated with the sacrifices that have to be made in the desire to be discursively recognizable and knowable. What is to be given up when we attain politically legible and securable identity-positions? But in terms of the politics of resistance, the effect of silence and dissimulation can be productive, not only because it signals a rejection of codified sets of rules, positions and platforms, but because dissimulation is also marked by a deconstructive resistance to always conforming to itself. If deconstruction has taught us anything, it should be a suspicion of totalizing claims signaled by the resistance to inhabiting unitary, politically enclosed positions on behalf of a particular political programme.

Yet, this invisibility, and the dissimulations linked to indecipherable silence, raise questions about the nature of reading. Indeed, the potentiality of the indecipherability of this silence is also responsible for its continued re-contextualizations. As the Elder Daughter indicates, for example, in frustration when she encounters the silence of the Younger Daughter, 'She is always silent. Nobody knows what she is scheming in her mind'. Nevertheless, should we, the reader as specular subjects, speak for her? Should she, the subalternised Silent Daughter, be 'spoken of'? Should we, like the Old Man and the Elder Daughter in *Lear* 'make her speak'? Am 'I', are 'we' authorized even to speak in her name? How do we read the Other while avoiding the pitfalls of the consummation of the Self? After all, would not this consummation spell a return to the onto-theological desire inherent in the politics of the visible? If 'I' or if 'we' were to write *for* her, to speak *for* her, surely that would be tantamount to either an invention of a new voice which would amount to either stealing her voice or to silencing her voice and thus eliminating the possibilities of new voices, with all the attendant exclusionary violences that the appropriation implies. In being mindful to all these double-binds, then if there is a rule, a readable and visible itinerary to illuminate the approach towards the Other, it remains a secret and a stumbling block. If our understanding of ourselves hinges on our apprehending the Other, then 'We' too, our identity, our subjectivity is haunted by the trace of the Other. The secret is the haunting of our subjectivity by the trace of the Other who,

because it is other to the system, represents the border and the limit to our identifications, the limit between inside and outside, between Self and Other.

Confronted by the ambiguity of the Younger Daughter's silence, the invisible non-thematizable Other to the system, we encounter a narrative derailment and the suspension of our will to knowledge. This invisibility, according to Derrida (1993a) is the *punctum caecum* in the field of our present-vision. An alternative approach to the Otherness of her position would be to curb the temptation to make her 'speak', and to begin instead rethinking the governing assumptions behind such critical enterprises particularly our responses to the Other and forms of Otherness. But these questions are not waiting to be solved definitively and decidedly, once and for all. Rather, as was already intimated, these questions are, for better or worse, aporias that stage undecidability.

On account of her unreadability, the Silent Younger Daughter represents a radical alterity posed by the encounter with the Other's otherness and the question is thus not to decide, once and for all, what is the 'essential truth' about the Other, thus setting aside the undecidability of her, of his or its identity. Rather, it is a question of acquiring a critical vigilance when we are confronted by these undecidables that return to haunt us repeatedly in our reflections and the choices we have to make in our ethical encounter with the Other who is undecidable and unknowable. In Derridean terms, this undecidability is a response to these paradoxes which also recognizes that it would be ultimately unethical to resolve it. Any ultimate resolution would once again collapse prescription into description, and the Other, in all its ambiguous Otherness, should not and cannot, for Derrida, be reduced or contained in the here and now of any system. To do so would be to reduce the trace of Otherness and, for Derrideans, the trace of Otherness cannot be obliterated. A politically disposed reading of the politics of the undecidable posed by the indecipherability of the Other would then not claim, for instance, that political actions or decisions are impossible. Rather, the politics of the undecidable highlights how we write in the dark and our structural non-knowing entails that we refuse to close down the questions of differences and Otherness that are Other to the system. What is entailed instead by the politics of the undecidable is an incessant and continual negotiation and the political, as a practice of the invisible, understood as an

eschatological desire for the movement to the Beyond of the current limit condition would also be at odds with a conservative politics that attempt to naturalize the status quo.[17]

Take for example a feminism that sets out to achieve a defined goal, a feminism that thinks it knows what women want and what they should be. Such a feminism, which is determined on the grounds of a universal and stable political category of 'Woman' will turn out to be doing the work of patriarchy which asks 'what do women want?', 'what is women?', thus determining the proper place for women. To argue for the political indeterminacy for/of women, to argue for the politics of the undecidable does not spell the end of political organization or social justice for women. Rather, by acknowledging the undecidability of the Other and thus affirming the alterity of the Other, such a politics take the multiple determinations of women as the space in which freedom arises. And this freedom is that of affirmative uncertainty. Undoubtedly, as feminists, we are all concerned for women (for their rights and for social justice), yet at the same time we do not know what they are. The lessons of deconstruction would urge us to consider, within the context of feminism, that political subjects are provisional, and a politics which does not have a notion of a stable subject as its founding principle is a politics understood as the politics of the undecidable. A deconstructive alliance with feminism would warn us of the dangers of a politics grounded in stable subjects or normalising identity prescriptions.[18] This form of politics would construe the realm of negotiations as limited by the political models which preceded them. And while within the politics of the undecidable there may still be the possibility of injustice, nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that within this space, the art of the perhaps, the political would still be the space of contestations and negotiations with regard to the social. What binds us, instead, is that we also do not know what we are – yet. Yet, we have to enact a writing in the dark, and the specificity of a politically disposed reading of the Younger Daughter or

---

[17] The Other's otherness calls for an affirmative disposition towards the Other to come and this underlines the undecidability of riskily underdefined political projects. Jean-Luc Nancy has, for example, suggested that the political 'defines at least a limit, at which all politics stops and begins. The communication that takes place on this limit, and that, in truth, constitutes it' (Nancy, 1996: 80).

[18] While I am indicating that the politics of the undecidable names the indeterminacy of women, I am not suggesting however that this spells a subjective autonomy or the free for all play of signifiers. Rather, by arguing for a non-essentialist understanding of women, I am indicating that the determinations of women have to be understood as open-ended and multiply determined across intersecting axes of differences.

any other woman includes the insistence that the politics of the undecidable introduced by the alterity of the Other must be understood from the standpoint of this indeterminacy, including the attendant political possibilities that are opened up by the potentiality of imagining different ways of being with Otherness and alternate forms of political engagements. The political, as a writing in the dark, is best understood, to reiterate, as the realm of continual negotiation in the absence of formal accounting procedures. Homi Bhabha, for example, stresses the central role negotiations play in politics when he refers to Nelson Mendela:

> As Nelson Mendela said only the other day, even if there is a war on you must negotiate – negotiation is what politics is about. And we do negotiate even when we don't know we are negotiating: we are always negotiating in any situation of political opposition or antagonism. Subversion is negotiation; transgression is negotiation; negotiation is not just some kind of compromise or 'selling out' which people too easily understand it to be (Bhabha, 1990: 207).

By stressing the importance of negotiations, Bhabha recognizes that this form of politics, understood as a politics of the undecidable, often take place without recourse to pre-given methods or calculations. To put it another way, this is to say that the affirmation of the Other to come (and for Derrida this includes, for example, the future to come, the community to come and a democracy to come) is always in process without it becoming determinable and hence, not produced from descriptions of past or present political models. This form of unknowability holds out the possibility, to use Gayatri Spivak's words, for 'revolutions that as yet have no model' (Spivak, 1980) and acknowledges the possibility of imagining other political spaces and other spaces of political Otherness.

Recall the questions I posed earlier in this section. How does one read the Other? How do we prepare to read the Other, who on account of its cryptic indecipherability remain Other to the system of representation. What are the implications involved when we enforce the Silent Daughter or any Other to speak and hence to become visible and representable within our own terms? As I have attempted to demonstrate, if in succumbing to the temptations to ascribe a definitive truth claim and a proper significance to what is meant by the Younger Daughter's silence and hence her Otherness, the price that we pay by enclosing the Other within a representable and

readable discourse is the reduction of the trace of difference. To put it another way, what is at stake, then, when the Other is transubstantiated into the Same, a readable discourse, is an enactment of the ontological totalitarian political violence inherent to the politics of the visible. Also at stake is the question of the limit and the imposition of calculability. As a politics of the visible, this form of politics accompanies the simultaneous erasure of differences, hybridity and the disavowal of the impossible. But as Derrida indicates, the Other cannot be reduced in relation to me, or to our own frames of representability on the basis of a mutual recognition. For Derrida, there is always a trace of Otherness that resists capture. Moreover, for Derrida, the basis of an ethical relation to the Other is not one of identification with those we recognize who are like ourselves of this community. Rather, the ethical relation, for Derrida, is encountered in the otherness of the Other, the stranger in all its unknowability who beckons us to heed the call of responsibility.

If, as I have indicated, in recuperating the silence of the Younger Daughter, in naming her and placing her, thus suggesting the ascription of a definitive truth to her silence, the risk we take is yet another paradoxical effacement. In naming her, the Otherness of her subject-position is reduced into the Same. This is the effacement of the singularity of the Other.[19] For Derrida, while writing indicates the system of representation that makes communication possible, Derrida also argues that the bestowal of a proper name, which no social order or representational schemes can avoid, also implies a system of classification by which a people or a group recognizes another. As Derrida writes, this power to name carries a violence, 'the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying [...] To think the unique within the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of arche-writing: arche-violence' (Derrida, 1997a: 112).

While it is impossible to escape representational schemes utterly, at the same time one must recognize that such programmatic schemes of naming reduces the trace of

---

[19] See Derrida (1995: 389-90) on this paradoxical double-bind: 'The name is the appellation of a singularity but also, in the possibility of repeating this appellation, it is the effacement of that singularity. To name and to cause the name to disappear is not necessarily contradictory [...] Sometimes the effacement of the name is the best safeguard, sometimes it is the worse "victimization". This double bind [...] renders impossible a determined or determinable decision concerning which is better: very often to inscribe the name is to efface the bearer of the name.'

Otherness and remain unfaithful to radical alterity. By suggesting that the silence of the Younger Daughter remains unreadable, I also draw attention to Derrida who argues that language, as a system of representation, is always already violent as it cannot help us to approach the 'unthinkable-impossible-unutterable beyond (tradition's) Being and Logos (Derrida, 1978a: 114).[20] We cannot know the 'thereness' (the *il y a*) of the Other because we can only know the thing itself from within our own system of representation. Within this account, knowledge production of the Other, the Silent Younger Daughter for example, in terms of representation, is always a violation of Otherness. Indeed, for Levinas, for example, representation is suppression. The Otherness of the Other is always a victim of the violence of language. Yet, as a system of representation, language cannot escape violence, which is 'the necessary condition of the institution of any system' (Johnson, 1993: 64). In other words, Derrida questions the ways in which the Other comes to appear. After all, how can the Other appear as Other without appearing as 'Other' in the Same? How can the Other be perceived as Other if not by the Same, and if it is perceived and hence, representable, how can it be Other? The implication of Derrida's thinking is also significant in our attempt to read and approach the Other 'represented', in this case, by the radical alterity posed by the indecipherable silence of the Younger Daughter. In terms of a politically disposed reading practice that is responsible to Otherness, if the silence of the Younger Daughter is readable and hence representable, she cannot be Other especially when it, the Other is perceived and reduced to the Same. And if it is not perceived through the Same, it cannot appear at all. The Other remains invisible and unknowable. To quote Derrida again, the Other remains 'unsayable' (1986a: 115). We cannot know the 'outside', the 'thereness' of the Other as the Other remains the invisible Other to our systems of representations. To speak of and hence, represent the 'thereness' of the Other would

---

[20] Similarly, for Miller, 'it is impossible to get outside the limits of language by means of language' (Miller, 1987: 59). For de Man, and likewise Miller, it is impossible to get outside language. Instead, they argue for the 'unreadability' of texts. de Man, for example, argues that a text 'cannot be closed off by a single reading'. He suggests instead that this impossibility in developing a single and determinative reading 'engenders [...] a supplementary figural superimposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration' (de Man, 1979: 205). Similarly, Miller, in his discussion of Shelley's *Triumph of Life* and its multiple readings, argue that the poem "like all texts, is 'unreadable', if by readable one means a single, definitive interpretation [...] neither the 'obvious' nor the 'deconstructionist' reading is 'univocal'. Each contains, necessarily, its enemy within itself, is itself both host and parasite' (Miller, 1979: 226). What he is suggesting, if I am correct in my reading of him, is the impossibility of producing closure in meanings and this includes the impossibility of developing definitive readings of events or political practices.

be a willful act of appropriation. For Derrideans, the only way to cope with these stumbling blocks is to be open to the philosophy of the limit. This means that we open up to what Derrida refers to as

> The call (to) (of) eschatology [...] the opening of a question [...] put to philosophy as logos, finitude, history, violence: an interpolation of the Greek by the non-Greek at the heart of silence, an ultralogical affect of speech, a question which can be stated only by being forgotten in the language of the Greeks; and a question which can be stated, as forgotten, only in the language of the Greeks. (Derrida, 1978a: 133)

To summarise the above, in our attempts to read, and hence represent and enclose the Other, the Younger Daughter, within a representability, what is entailed by this demand for a readability of the Other is a return to the politics of the visible together with its association with calculability and terminality. Such a politics is circumscribed, to reiterate, by both a refusal and an effacement of the singularity of the Other. In forcing the Other to inhabit the discourse of the Same which acts as a regulative horizon, we thereby subject the Other to the regulations and to the regulative practices associated with the despotism of Selfsameness. Supposed by this transubstantiation of Otherness to the horizon of Sameness is a practice whereby the multiplicity and pluralities of the discourses of Otherness may be grasped as one and the Same.[21] In short, the Other is delimited and inscribed within the system of representation for the purposes of manipulation and distribution. What this spells out is that the specular subject, in his desire for knowledge and visibility of the Other, succumbs to the temptations and pitfalls of a panopticisim and the inevitable duplication of himself in the register of the universal thus securing a self-confirming, self-coinciding presence. In short, this ontological totalitarian disposition spells the

---

[21] On encountering the difficulty in thinking the Other in any authentic manner, Alain Badiou writes, '[A]ccording to Levinas, it is impossible to arrive at an authentic thought of the Other (and thus an ethics of the relation to the Other) from the despotism of the Same, which is incapable of recognizing this Other. The dialectic of the Same and the Other, conceived [...] under the dominance of self-identity [...] ensures the absence of the Other in effective thought, suppresses all genuine experience of the Other, and bars the way to an ethical understanding of alterity' (Badiou, 2001: 18-19). As he indicates, one always relates to the Other from the location of the Same and that between the self, the Same and the Other, there exists an abyss always already there in place in the act of thinking or approaching the Other.

deployment of the regulatory violence of the Same.[22] As a politics of the visible, this form of politics carries within it the repression of the Other to the community.

The wider political implication of demanding a readability from the Other, the Younger Daughter for example, is that in securing the Other within a visible knowability, the result is the achievement of a universalisation of a particular consciousness which is insured and required by the recognition of the Other, a recognition that is dependent in her participation in the 'We' of this regulative horizon of visibility that authorizes and legitimizes in the processes of universalisation. But as we have seen, this mode of universalisation also spells the effacement of Otherness. Inherent to the politics of the visible is the specular economy which is dependent on a circuit of recognition whereby the Other enacts a mirror-function, and in this circuit of recognition, the specular subject is thus constituted as the subject with the right to recognition, to recognize and to be recognized. In Drucilla Cornell's understanding, for example, the universalisation of legal principles would on the one hand establish a normative legal system and thus contribute to feelings of 'belongingness' to a community. But on the other hand, because the law is exclusionary, and because the universalisation of a particular consciousness would contribute to the formal and reductionist application of the law within a given community, the establishment and universalisation of legal principles also represents an imperialistic power. On this count, the law, for Cornell, on account that it inevitably violates differences via the establishment of shared normative meanings, is ultimately unfaithful to the ethical relationship to the Other (Cornell, 1992).

In the above discussion, I attempted to highlight the questions and the problems posed by the Younger Daughter's silence and attendant impossibility of readability posed by that indecipherable silence. In doing so, I considered what happens when we are tempted to 'read' and to deduce the 'proper significance' of the Other when we attempt to represent Otherness. The temptation to recuperate her position led me to consider that this represents the enclosure of the Other within a readable discourse. To presume we can 'read' the Other, and see in advance what will happen, is to depoliticize the political at a stroke. This presumption of being able to

---

[22] As Derrida already indicated: 'Once it is read, [...] it is immediately repeated and, consequently, in this iterability that makes it readable, it loses the singularity that it keeps. It loses what it wants to keep' (Derrida, 1995: 378).

see and to know in advance, an aspect of the politics of the visible as terminality and calculability, in an all encompassing sweeping glance would re-conceive the specular subject in all his self-certifying presence. This presumption would also spell the return to the transcendental subject as sovereign presence who holds court and sets out the conditions of possibility in advance and therefore the limits for the emergence of phenomenon in political projects. Additionally, by transubstantiating the Other into the Same, the Other is reduced by a violence of representation into an enclosure. This reduction of the trace of difference, introduced by the Other into the Same, delimits the un-thought and the otherwise. The practices of the visible, as a politics of the calculable possible, thus act like the border police that marks off and delimits the trace of the Other. But this exclusionary force also excludes and enacts the limits to possible experience and alternate forms of engagements with Otherness. As a form of politics, the politics of the visible as terminality and calculability marks the limits of our ability and possibility to speak 'in other words' by forming a consensus on what is possible and impossible.[23] As a politics of limits, this enclosure of Otherness via an inclusive exclusion forecloses the political and the possibility of transgressing the border of this enclosure. As a form of politics, the politics of visibility as terminality also spells the return to the politics of presencing of Man. As a return to this transcendental signified, this also indicates that the centre which has being evacuated by the 'death' of one eschatology i.e. 'God' is filled by another occupant, re-centered around Man.[24]

---

[23] The words, 'thinking in other words' is the title of the concluding section of Levinas' *Otherwise than Being* (1999) and to be brief, as the this chapter is not about to attempt a critique of *Otherwise than Being*, the significance of this text lies in the way it uses philosophy to undo philosophy and its attempt to speak 'in other words'. In its attempt to use the language of philosophy to show the limits of philosophy and thus to go to the Beyond or the outside, it explores, to borrow from Drucilla Cornell again, 'the philosophy of the limit', resembling an act of deconstruction. Because it attempts to escape the limits imposed by the language of philosophy, it shares a 'direction' or similarity in its approach to Derrida's deconstructive thinking. However, in its approach and methods, one could hazard a suggestion by saying that it is not a work of deconstruction. However, like Derrida's usage of philosophical language to inhabit and to dismantle the philosophical canon from within, Levinas' attempts as well, in his performative writing style to interrupt philosophical language itself. *Otherwise than Being* is 'about' the interruption of philosophic language but it represents at the same time, the attempt to move to the beyond, beyond Being to what is otherwise.

[24] This is also another name for logocentrism which puts meaning at the centre and imagines that the transcendental signified exists in some realm of pure consciousness. Logocentrism names the belief that the first and last thing is the logos, the Word, the Divine Mind and the self-coinciding presence of pure consciousness. The transcendental signified is thus the one true meaning that holds all others in place and forms the status of a foundational truth that exists beyond all questions and provides all the answers to subsidiary questions. For example, for Christianity, the transcendental signified is God.

However, the abjection and the relegation of the Silent Daughter to the outside teaches us that what has been relegated to the outside continues to organize the inside even though what has returned manages to evoke the un-representable, which is what Derrida has called 'the absolute other of the system' (Derrida,1981: 22). By suggesting that the alterity performed by the Silent Daughter signals the un-representable, I also draw attention to what Derrida has written in terms of the 'un-representable':

> it is unnameable in its singularity. If one could name it or represent it, it would begin to enter into the auto-effective circle of mastery and reappropriation. An economy would be possible. The disgusting X cannot even announce itself as a sensible object without being caught in a teleographical hierarchy. It is therefore in-sensible and un-intelligible, irrepresentable and unnameable, the absolute other of the system. (Derrida, 1981: 22)

And in speaking of the un-representable, Derrida evokes the radical alterity of the Other. Understood in this sense, the radical alterity of the Other evades a circumscription within the Same. The alterity of the Other is performed by the indecipherability of the Younger Daughter's silence and it is this silence that evades the desire for readability characteristic of the politics of the visible. Within the context of feminism, the gift that is given to me by the Silent Daughter in *Lear* is a lesson of the political implications of this transubstantiation of Otherness into the Same. Simply, such an operation spells a return to an essentialism.

To better understand this issue of the desire for readability and hence the visibility of the Other, we can again turn to Drucilla Cornell who argues that this form of essentialism should be recognized in the wider context especially when 'the appeal to the generic Woman [erases] the full significance of national and class differences among women. Such appeals to the generic Woman have been challenged for establishing the hegemony of white women's experience as the experience of all women. The result is that feminism stands accused of silencing women in the name of giving them a voice' (Cornell, 1993: 6). This is also linked to how we 'read' the Other, the 'Third World Woman' for example, or any Woman for that matter. Our knowledge production of her, in the sense of our representation of her within our own systems of representation, would be another form of violation. She is the Other, the

stranger who judges me on the basis of my responses and my responsibility towards her. In my (in)ability to read her, there is always already a finitude in meaning and an impossibility to fully understand. However, it should be emphasized that this is not to relegate the unreadability of the radical alterity of the Other into yet another space beyond comprehension. Such an exclusion to another form of impenetrability would be another form of erasure, a form of keeping her safe from oneself. Such a relegation to another externality is another form of violence, another form of self-containment. Such a violent act would be another way to deny the trace of the Other in oneself. This other form of exclusionism keeps the 'I' safe from the 'contamination' of the Other, the constitutive outside. Instead, Derrida indicates, 'I am also the other's other and that I know I am' (Derrida, 1978a: 128).

Yet, the Other, Woman for example, must be represented, and yet, to both affirm and open to the otherness of the Other calls for moving beyond the limits imposed by the calculability and terminality associated with by the politics of the visible as eschatology. To be able to 'read' the alterity of the Other, a Derridean would suggest that a reading practice, if it is to remain ethical, should not define meanings in order to enframe it definitively in order to tell you that this is the only possible way to approach the Other. A reading practice, to be ethical, would want to resist the desire for premature closure. As was intimated, in an attempt to read and hence, represent and decipher the silence of the Younger Daughter, a politically disposed reading practice should demonstrate the difficulties and impossibility of defining meaning in a univocal way. For example, I have attempted to argue that the Silent Daughter remains unreadable on account of her cryptic silence. On account of the 'thereness' of her silence, any reading of her that attempts to ascribe a truth claim to her cryptic silence, be it a reading that ascribes a victimhood or a disempowerment, is unverifiable and impossible to validate. She remains indecipherable and impossible to read. As Miller explains, a text remains potentially unreadable on account that a reading of it is 'potentially unverifiable. If a reader has no access to what lies behind a sign but another sign, then all reading of signs cannot be sure whether or not it is in error. Reading would then be a perpetual wandering or displacement that can never be checked against anything except another sign' (Miller, 1990: 97). So, a reading of the Other in the sense of a representation of the Other has to happen but, at the same time, a politically disposed reading practice has to acknowledge the

impossibility of reading on account of the unreadability of the 'text'. For de Man, this also means that a reading 'is an argument [...] because it has to go against the grain of what one would want to happen in the name of what has to happen'. What has to happen, in terms of our reading practice of the Other, the Silent Daughter for example, is a responsibility to her Otherness that avoids another form of victimization or essentialism.[25] The ways in which we read the Other has, to put it simply, significant implications in terms of our political practices regarding the ways in which we approach forms of political and social Otherness.

Perhaps this aspiration to be responsive and responsible to the Other in a politically disposed reading requires a passion of/for the impossible and requires, at the very minimum, the removal of cognitive certainty. It requires, in short, an eschatological desire, a desire for the otherwise or a thinking 'in other words'. And the point of eschatological desire is that the ethical relation to the Other cannot be actualized even though it has to be enacted in the here and now because, for Derrida, the ethical relation, 'is impossible – unthinkable – unsayable' (Derrida, 1978a: 84). In a politically disposed reading practice that aspires to the ethical relation, the possibility of enacting this ethical relation to the Other is marked as the limits of the possible. The possibility of the ethical relation lies in its impossibility – the impossibility of fulfilling the demands of the ethical relation and, for Derrida, this is necessary if we are to respect the radical difference of the Other. To say that the ethical relation has to be enacted, and yet remains impossible to fulfill, is to say that while the ethical relation and the responsibility it entails is necessary, yet they are always already threatened at the same time by the displacing actions of other judgments. Deconstruction makes us aware of both that necessity as well as the contingent status of ethical judgments. On this count, the deconstructive motivation underlying a politically disposed opened up and entailed by Otherness insists that while we have to make judgments and take actions, these actions have to begin with the displacement of the assurance of a self-present subject. That is to say, for example, while passing judgments, a deconstructive alliance with feminism would

---

[25] Thomas Keenan writes for example, that a 'reading [...] is what happens when we cannot apply the rules. This means that reading is an experience of responsibility, but that responsibility is not a moment of security or of cognitive certainty. Quite the contrary: the only responsibility worthy of the name comes with the removal of grounds, the withdrawal of the rules or the knowledge on which we might rely to make our decisions for us' (Keenan, 1997: 1).

simultaneously question their ethical status and their own politics of position. This is the space of interrogation which becomes the space where the status of the question must be decided even as the interrogation of the question is itself questioned. There is no end to the demands of the ethical relation and the questionings it provoke. Rather, the politics of the invisible is disposed to a passion for the impossible, of the to-come and the Beyond, and understood in these terms, the ethical relation to the Other can only be adhered to as an aspiration to be strived for instead of prescribing what 'ought to be'. The politics of the undecidable does not mean that decisions are impossible. Rather, it names the refusal to ground decisions in pre-existing universal laws. The ethical relation in a politically disposed reading of the Other is not a matter of calculability.[26] As a politics of the invisible, this aspiration to/for the impossible guards the Other from assimilation and reduction to the Selfsame. For Levinas, this passion for the impossible is a summons to the poetics of obligation and its chiasmic association with an unconditional responsibility to the Other. The 'call' of Otherness summons a unique response not inscribed in universal thought and is instead the unforeseeable response to Other to come (Levinas, 1999). In this sense, the ethical relation underlining a politically disposed reading that responds to the Other is a necessity and yet, an impossibility. It is a necessity that has to be heeded and yet, a responsibility that can never be utterly fulfilled.

The attempt to read the alterity of the Other, the *il y a*, embodied here and opened up by the Younger Daughter, highlights how even a politically disposed reading practice that embraces a politics of the invisible has to remain faithful and responsible to Otherness, opening the possibility of a non-violent, non-eschatological relationship to Otherness. As was already signaled, such an ethical moment aspires then to a responsibility to guard the Other against a proprietorial appropriation that would erase and deny her difference and singularity. Because politics is an encounter with and the attempt to handle differences, a just or ethical politics has to seek ways of handling those differences without implying that the Other or forms of Otherness can

---

[26] For example, in *Eating Well,* Derrida writes, 'I believe there is no responsibility, no ethico-political decision, that must not pass through the proofs of the incalculable or the undecidable. Otherwise everything would be reducible to calculation, program, causality, and, at best, "hypothetical imperative" (Derrida,1991: 108).

be made identical by means of that treatment. While there are differences, these differences are not symmetrical. Nor do they fit into a neat and hierarchical order. If we have learnt our lessons from deconstruction, a politically disposed reading practice does not impose a univocal meaning onto the text or the Other that it attempts to read and understand. As a practice of reading, it is embodied by a promise to be faithful to the alterity of the Other. We cannot do otherwise and this ethical moment is also transferable to how we think politics and the retrieval of the political, how we think our forms of political engagements with the Other: 'the ethical moment in the act of reading, then, if there is one, faces in two directions. On the one hand it is the response to something, responsive to it, respectful of it. In any ethical moment there is an imperative, some "I must" or *Ich kann nicht anders*. I *must* do this. I cannot do otherwise [...] the ethical moment in reading leads to an act. It enters into social, institutional, political realms [...]' (Miller,1987: 104-5). Like deconstruction, this ethical moment encompassed in our attempt to 'read' and approach the Other is an exercise of responsibility to Otherness. By affirming the singularity and the otherness of the Other, we similarly acknowledge that the Other is someone or something we can never truly determine or occupy because it is in principle inaccessible. The alterity of the Other would be destroyed if I had access to it. As a form of politics, the practice of the invisible acknowledges the essential unreadability of Otherness, recognizing instead that the readability of the Other, for example Woman, is impossible if by 'readable', one means a single, definitive and univocal interpretation.

This question of reading the Other that aspires to the eschatological desire to enact the ethical relation draws attention to what Caputo has suggested: that the Other elicits a unique response that is not inscribed in and is in excess of a universalizable and formalizable script. The lesson that I have learnt from the attempt to read the silence of the Younger Daughter is that the Other, who cannot ever be totally grasped, puts to test our overly prescriptive ethical accounts that claim the possibility of programmable ethical praxis, including the drawing of definitive, readable itineraries that are guides for regularized decisions. Such programmable decidables constitute the politics of the possible as the only calculable possible. Rather, our unconditional responsibility to the radical difference of the Other, an Other we are hostage to, is a responsibility that cannot be utterly fulfilled. It is infinite. Instead, as

Caputo indicates, we are 'thrown' into it. We have no choice and responsibility 'happens'. This retrieval of the ethical is nonetheless chiasmically intertwined with the retrieval of the political. The political 'happens' as a possibility in its disposition and response to the Other who is absolute and wholly Other.[27] As work and as interminable process, the political as ethical encounter with the Other's otherness puts to the test politics and ethics. The ethical and the political are chiasmically intertwined and as Caputo clarifies:

> On the view I am defending ethics is always already in place, is factically there as soon as there is *Dasein*, as soon as there is world. Ethics is not something fitted into a world that is somehow constituted prior to it. Ethics constitutes the world in the first place [...] if you want to think what truly 'is' you have to start with ethics and obligation, not add to it later. To put it in terms I prefer, the space of obligation is opened up by factical life, by the plurality of living bodies [...] and above all, in these times, in the times of holocausts and of killing fields, by bodies in pain. (Caputo, 1988: 167)

For Derrida as well, the obligation to Otherness is a debt that cannot be calculated, and the call to a responsibility to the Other comes from nowhere. Justice to the Other does not involve debts that can be repaid thus ending the need for responsibility. Rather, for Derrida, justice, which is inherent to the ethical relation to the Other, involves a recognition that debts cannot be repaid, and therefore means committing oneself to the endless work of reparation without a final redemption.[28]

To sum, the attempt to read the alterity of the Other, exemplified by the indecipherability of the Silent Daughter, names the figure of the aporetic, staging both an undecidability and the limits of knowability. The call to an ethical

---

[27] The absolute and wholly other, as Caputo clarifies, is any Other, man, woman, God or animal (Caputo, 1988). In Derridean terms, the absolute and wholly other calls for a theory and disposition toward radical alterity. The absolute other is without and beyond any determination and calculability and specification. As Derrida has often reminded us, the absolute other is the condition of experience of otherness and the impossible.

[28] Derrida writes: 'The origin of the call that comes from nowhere [...] institutes a responsibility that is to be found at the root of all ulterior responsibilities (moral, juridical, political), and of every categorical imperative. [...] Something of this call of the other must remain nonreappropriable, nonsubjective, and in a certain way nonidentifiable, a sheer supposition, so as to remain *other*, a *singular* call to response or to responsibility. This is why the determination of the singular "Who?" – or at least it determination as subject – still remains problematic. And it *should* remain so. This obligation to protect the other's otherness is not merely a theoretical imperative' (Derrida, 1991: 10-111).

responsibility to the Other's otherness, foregrounded by a politically disposed reading of the Silent Younger Daughter, is marked by both a necessity and yet, an impossibility. It is a necessity that has to be heeded and yet, a responsibility that can never be utterly fulfilled. She, the Other, remains, like the question 'Who am I?' 'What are We?' suspended and to-come. In short, the attempts to read the indecipherability of the Younger Daughter's silence entail a politically disposed reading practice that embraces the ethical relation in its non-assimilationist aspiration to be responsible to Otherness. This reading practice that the alterity of the Other, in this case, the Younger Daughter, entails does not seek to define a single political truth of her subject-positioning. Rather, by not seeking to ventriloquise her subject-position, it seeks to do justice to her position while acknowledging both the inevitable unknowability of her Otherness and the uncertainty of our knowledge claims. In many ways, the uncertainty of her subject-positioning highlights the uncertainty of our own positioning. What is undermined by the ultimate unknowability of Otherness is the perceptual faith of the egological 'I', an I Who May Be rather than the I Am Who Am. The singularity of the Other brings us to the limits our knowledge. She, the silent Younger Daughter, like the Other's otherness, remains open to questioning. The Other questions our ethical and political practices to/with the Other, including the truth claims we make on behalf of the Other.

Conclusion: Writing in the Dark and the Art of the Perhaps

> If woman is truth, she at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no place here, and that no one has a place for truth. And she is woman precisely because she herself does not believe in truth itself, because she does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not.
>
> Jacques Derrida

> It is the other who will decide what I am – man or woman.
>
> Jacques Derrida

In the preceding section, by using the silence of the Younger Daughter as the lever of intervention with which to understand firstly, the politics of the invisible and

secondly, the light it sheds on our political dispositions to Otherness, I attempt to highlight that in the ethical situation, the encounter with the singularity of the Other is one for whom 'I' or 'we' are utterly unprepared for. The Other, marked by unclassifiability, also marks the limits of reading. The Other resists easy reading or formalization. In the ethical situation and in a politically disposed reading practice, it is the singularity of the Other that I encounter and must respond and be responsible to.[29] If all we had to do was to apply a set of formal rules to reading, then we would not be doing justice to the Other. In this light, the singularity of the Other is always an exception that exceeds itself from universalisation or predictability.[30]

But why should the radical alterity of the Other, performed by the silence of the Younger Daughter, concern me? Like Levinas' question 'What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper?' (Levinas, 1999: 117), the significance of this question suggests that, to quote Levinas:

> Questions have meaning only if one has already supposed the ego is concerned with itself, is only a concern for itself. In this hypothesis, it indeed remains incomprehensible that the absolute outside-of-me, the other would concern me. But in the 'pre-history' of the ego posited for itself speaks a responsibility, the self is through and through a hostage, older than the ego, prior to principles (Levinas, 1999: 117).

The Other is the one to whom I am hostage and for Levinas, this means that we are always already responsible for others in the world. To rehearse again, the Other as absolute Other should concern us. And the ethical moment in reading, as I have attempted to highlight in my politically disposed reading practice of the Silent Younger Daughter, has to be both responsive and responsible to the Other. Simply, every text has a singularity for which the act of reading should be responsible and to which the act of reading should respond. How we read is therefore irreducible to a

---

[29] The singularity of the Other is not reducible to the mutuality of a contract or recognition which presumes that two subjects can come to terms and agree so as to put an end to otherness. The invocation of singularity insists on radical and unassimilable difference that constitutes the alterity of Other's otherness.

[30] For Derrideans, a 'good' reading does not reduce a text to a mundane or definitive reading devoid of the Other. The point of reading, if we have learnt our lesson from Derrida, is to cope with the undecidability of a text which is the condition of its readability. But undecidability is not a way of being unfaithful to the text. Neither does it mean a descent into a free play of meanings. Rather, Derrida's undecidability prevents the text from settling into a thesis, a singular 'proper' truth and familiarity and prevents us, moreover, from settling into a position of mastery, domination and certitude towards the text.

prescription because of that singularity and the responsibility to that singularity which reading entails. The very otherness of the Other imposes a duty upon us, before we can deny it. Levinas quotes Dostoyevsky when he suggests that this duty and responsibility is such that 'Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others' (Levinas, 1999: 146). Such a responsibility has to guard the Other from an imperialistic appropriation that reduces the Other into the totality of the Same.

The Other, as Derrida reminds us, is moreover always a singular Other, just this one and no Other. My relation to the Other cannot thus be constituted in the symmetry of a contract or mutual recognition. The alterity of the Other is so radically Other that it is irreducible to any determination, meaning that the ethical responsibility to the Other is not the mere obedience of pre-existing laws. Deconstruction, in Drucilla Cornell's feminist deconstructive alliance with critical legal studies, highlights that what is important is not our sovereign rights but our responsibility to the rights of the Other to be different, to be heard and addressed (Cornell, 1992). Indeed, as Derrida explains, 'responsibility is excessive or it is not responsibility' (Derrida, 1991: 118). What the Silent Younger Sister teaches me, in my attempt to conduct a politically disposed reading, is that in wanting to know the Other, our responses to the Other have to bear a certain responsibility, even as we avoid subjecting her to inhabit the discourse of the Same. [31] What is sacrificed are the Others to whom I do not respond. Guilt is intrinsic to responsibility as 'one is never responsible enough' (Derrida, 1995b:51). This means that justice and responsibility remains impossible because it is impossible to do justice to justice definitively or to carry out one's responsibilities adequately. This is because justice, for Derrida, remains always to come. Responsibility involves the guilt and failure to respond adequately and Derrida offers us a profound thought-provoking example that is worth quoting in length:

> [...] because of the structure of the laws of the market that society has instituted and controls, because of the mechanisms of external debt and

---

[31] The double bind is encountered when we attempt to think the Other without reducing the Other into a visible, localizable place of identity and point of identification for the Self. With regard to this double bind, Critchley writes, for example, 'the very activity of thinking, which lies at the basis of epistemological, ontological, and veridical compréhension, is the reduction of plurality to unity, alterity to sameness. The very task of philosophy, the task of thinking is the reduction of otherness. In seeking to think the other, its otherness is reduced or appropriated to our understanding. To think philosophically is to comprehend [...] and master the other, thereby reducing its alterity' (Critchley, 1992: 29).

> other similar inequities, that same 'society' puts to or [...] allows to die of hunger and disease tens of millions of children (those neighbors or fellow humans that ethics or the discourse of rights of man refer to) without any moral or legal tribunal ever being considered competent to judge a sacrifice, the sacrifice of others to avoid being sacrificed oneself. Not only is it true that such a society participates in this incalculable sacrifice, it actually organizes it. The smooth functioning of its economic, political, and legal affairs, the smooth functioning of its moral discourse and good conscience presupposes the permanent operation of the sacrifice. And such a sacrifice is not even invisible, for from time to time television shows us, while keeping them at a distance, a series of intolerable images, and a few voices are raised to bring it all to our attention. But those images and voices are completely powerless to induce the slightest effective changes in the situation, to assign the least responsibility, to furnish anything more than a convenient alibi (Derrida, 1995b: 86).

For Derrida, this responsibility also provokes a responsibility of the decision. However, in order to be responsible for the Other, our decision, were it to be responsible, cannot be ours. It must be for the Other. It must be the Other's. If it were simply our decision, it is not a decision. According to Derrida, in our desire to be responsible and faithful to the Other, our decision has to be before any determination and specification. But as Derrida writes, the decision is haunted by the undecidable and '[I]ts ghostliness deconstructs from within any assurance of presence, any certitude [...] that would assure us of the justice of a decision, in truth of the very event of a decision' (Derrida, 1992a: 24-25). That is the aporia of the decision and of our responsibility.[32] But to reiterate, confronting the aporia is not necessarily

---

[32] In *Aporias*, Derrida also writes, 'the aporia [is] the condition of responsibility and decision' (1993: 16). Spivak also considers the broader implications that ethical decisions entail. She places a stress on the aporetic as an experience and not merely some logical conundrum: '[W]hen one decides to speak of aporias, one is haunted by the ghost of the undecidable in every decision. [...] When we find ourselves in the subject position of two determinate decisions, both right – or both wrong of course – one of which cancels the other, we are in an aporia which by definition cannot be crossed. Yet, it is not possible to remain in an aporia. It is not a logical or philosophical problem like a contradiction, [...] It can only be described as an experience. [...] For, as we know every day, even by supposedly not deciding, one of those two right or wrong decisions gets taken, and the aporia remains. Again, it must be insisted that this *is* the condition of possibility of deciding. In the aporia, to decide is the burden of responsibility [...] In the aporia, *to decide* is the burden of responsibility' (Spivak, 2001: 221-222).

something to despair over. Rather, by confronting the aporia we also acknowledge the contingency of politics. The aporia trips us up even when we try to insure against the unforeseen by drawing up plans to guide the conditions of possibility for the emergence of phenomenon in the field of our present vision. However, it is precisely because the aporia is always-already there in any plans that we can begin to enact a writing in the dark. To acknowledge the aporia in decisions is to embrace the desire for the impossible. This is also an embrace of a thinking at the limit, an eschatological desire for the openness introduced by the 'art of the perhaps'. This eschatological desire moves us away from the terminality and calculability of the politics of the visible. This is not to say, however, that this art of the perhaps is that of indecision. Rather, this is the space of interrogation which becomes a space in which the status of the question must be decided even as the interrogation itself is interrogated. It requires, as Derrida indicates, an incessant, daily negotiation. Or to borrow a favorite phrase from Spivak, it requires a constant 'critical vigilance' against falling back on dogmatism, orthodoxy, authoritarianism and fundamentalisms that mark off the borders and patrol the limits of possible experience. For Cornell, for example, because the law is deconstructible it means that existing legal frameworks are constantly exposed to correction and alteration in the light of the claim that the alterity of the Other and forms of Otherness put upon it, and this implies that the law has to be opened to its Other, to what it excludes, silences or erases. When Cornell re-conceptualises deconstruction as a 'philosophy of the limit', she indicates that deconstruction is a philosophy of delimitation, of resisting closures demonstrating at the same time, according to the logic of parergonality, how the establishment of a system also implies a beyond and an Other.

The insight drawn from the attempt to read the alterity of the Other, performed by the silence of the Younger Daughter, is that the issue, the task, as I understand from Derrida, is to develop a strategy of response that will open up to the Other who is not the Same. The response and the responsibility required by the Other involves, again, 'an incessant, daily negotiation [...] always deprived of insurance' (Derrida, 1995a: 95) It is to make a promise to the future of the Other and the Other of the future to come, it is 'always an act of memory, to the promised future of a text to be signed' (Derrida, 1986: 135). In other words, in responding to the Other, our responsiveness

and responsibility for the Other opens up a space for the Other and gives the Other a place and a future. This responsibility to the Other also means that we do not turn the Other into the Same, thereby making the Other into a home for 'us'. The Other, as Derrida indicates, 'remains an other whose law demands the impossible' (Derrida, 1984a: 4). And for me, the figure that makes this thinking *possible* is the figure of the Woman, the unrepresentable Otherness of the Silent Younger Daughter in *Lear*. Woman, the feminine who performs the alterity of the Other, who stages an affirmative undecidability, is the condition of *possibility* that makes possible this response to the Other. What this means is that an acceptance of Otherness also spells the death of self-certainty and security, promoting instead a writing in the dark. The Other traverses us and puts to death the self-certainty of the 'I Am Who I Am.' Because the 'I' is always traced and haunted by the marks of alterity, the 'I' can never be authentically and absolutely singular or sovereign. This is what Bhabha means when he says that '[I]t is only by losing the sovereignty of the self that you can gain the freedom of politics that is open to the non-assimilationist claims of cultural difference. The crucial feature of this new awareness is that it doesn't need to totalize in order to legitimate political action or cultural practice' (Bhabha, 1990a: 213).

A writing in the dark, translated into the sphere of feminist politics, acknowledges the dance of undecidability. But as Derrida repeatedly emphasized, the politics of the undecidable is 'not synonymous with either powerlessness or fragility' (Derrida, 1995a: 95). Rather, the response and the responsibility toward the Other in all her singularity involves, in Derrida's terms

> an incessant, daily negotiation – individual or not – sometimes microscopic, sometimes punctuated by a poker-like gamble; always deprived of insurance, whether it be in private life or within institutions. Each man and each woman must commit his or her own singularity, the untranslatable factor of his or her life and death (Derrida, 1995a: 95).

The ethical moment, understood in these terms, involves an imperative. It is a response to something, to the Other's otherness. It is, in short, an exercise of commitment and responsibility to the Other who is absolutely and singularly Other to me. It is an Otherness that traverses the 'I' whereby the 'I' becomes a stranger, a question unto itself. The mistake of liberal feminism in its attempts to address

women's subordination lies in transforming and circumscribing them into a visible, knowable framework and it runs the risk of further distorting the real subordination of women. The dance of undecidability, to repeat again, does not leave us paralyzed or helpless. Rather, Woman, the Other who announces undecidability holds out a promise and the possibility to an opening, and in Drucilla Cornell's understanding, this is the step 'to the beyond as a threshold we are invited to cross. As "a science of the threshold," deconstruction dares us to the commitment to "cross over" and perhaps, by so doing, to avoid the horror of having the door of the Law of the Law finally shut in our faces' (Cornell, 1992: 110).[33] Ethical feminism, as I understand Cornell's formulation, is the response to the Other. It is not merely an ethics of feminism but a feminism of ethics, understood as an affirmative disposition toward radical alterity which, for Cornell, signals a justice to-come. Ethical alterity, staged by the undecidability of Woman, is understood by Cornell as 'not just the command of the Other, it is also the Other within the *nomos* that invites us to new worlds and reminds us that transformation is not only possible, it is inevitable' (Cornell, 1992: 111). Understood in this light, ethical alterity does not leave us with despair but an opening. Ethical alterity, for Cornell, becomes the opening to a future and the 'endless transformative possibility that attempts to eradicate injustice demands' (Cornell, 1997: 164).

What is introduced by the unreadable alterity of the Younger Daughter is how we think the political in terms of our writing in the dark, especially if the Other remains invisible and insecurable for us. This writing in the dark is in many ways associated with a thinking at the limit. As a form of eschatological desire, this writing in the dark challenges us to move beyond that limit condition imposed by the politics of the visible as terminality and calculability. It challenges us to constantly re-open the question, to think again and puts into question our disposition toward radical

---

[33] Likewise for Derrida, 'woman' functions as the name that undoes mastery as it is also the name for undecidability. In *Choreographies* (1995a), for example, he affirms the turn towards the passion for the impossible and for the Other to come, for innumerable possibilities and other political spaces to come. The unknowability of Woman becomes, for Derrida, an excess, the Other to the system and an opening to the future. Because, for Derrida, Woman resists essentialising gestures and delimitation to a rigorously and properly identifiable place, Woman is always to come and this allegory of Woman also holds out the possibility of being otherwise. The thought of the Beyond, the philosophy of the limit, introduced by Derrida's thinking about the affirmative undecidability of Woman delimits the knowledge claims of identity positions, taking instead the form of delimitation which affirms the Other, the future to come.

difference. The Other awaits us at the border and ushers us to the threshold of undecidability, situating us at the limit of our knowledge. The radical alterity of the Other's otherness situate and place us at our limit. In doing so, we approach the experience of the Other in all its singularity. Groundless, we experience the Other of experience; we encounter the impossible at the edge of our experience. We are placed at the limit of our present determinations, identifications and calculations. The Other, understood in this sense, is the real and calls for a radical relation with the radically non-relational. In Lacanian terms, the Other is the real beyond the Symbolic and the real is what we cannot know or symbolize within our own representational schemes. The real cannot be contained.[34] Cornell, for example, wants to assert that 'Woman' is the name for the dance of undecidability, not of a lack or absence, but of the more (*mere, mehr*) that excesses the identification and classification of gender roles assigned to her. For Cornell, because Woman is unknowable and is the name of radical alterity, she is thus an excess. On this count, for Cornell, Woman performs this dance of undecidability and dissimulation.[35] The implication underlying this mode of relating to the alterity of the Other is that because the Other is the excess to the system, the Other is also an opening to the future to-come, to a justice to-come which is as yet, undecidable and invisible within the limits of our present vision.

However, this new place, the art of the perhaps, should not mean an enervating despair. The opposite of *undecidability* is decidability and not decision and for Derrida, decidability is circumscribed by a forseeability, akin to programmability. Instead, underlying this writing in the dark is an affirmative undecidability that embraces an opening to the Beyond, the chance of ushering in something different and unforeseeable. In Derridean terms, these spaces of productive undecidability are the spaces whereby the politics of the visible, expressed as the desire for presencing and closures, are displaced into the space of the 'perhaps'. A writing in the dark commits us to the futural and is 'caught up in the space of the promise' (Derrida,

---

[34] When Lacan says for example that Woman does not exist, he does not mean that Woman is the place of a lack. Rather, he is indicating that woman is radically Other, that she resists essentialist formulations. Woman does not exist if this means *delimiting* Woman into a properly, identifiable place and identity. Woman, in short, is radically Other and the excess of the system.

[35] Cornell writes: 'In *Spurs* Woman is the very figure of the constitutive power of the not yet, the beyond to Lacan's Symbolic. The play of difference does exactly the opposite of what it is thought to be; it does not make utopian thinking impossible, it makes it absolutely necessary, because the meaning of Woman, and of sexual difference, is displaced into the future' (Cornell, 1993: 93).

1995: 384) which demands a response and a responsibility to the Other's otherness that remain to come. It is to commit, in Derrida's terms, to the affirmation of the *yes*: 'at the moment I commit myself to it, I say *yes to it and to you* in a certain manner. To say *yes* is also to promise, to promise moreover to confirm the *yes*. There is no yes that is not a promise to confirm itself. It is before me. As soon as I speak it, I am in it [...] Whether we will it or not, we are responsible. We respond to the other, we are responsible for the other' (Derrida, 1995: 384). This promise, this *yes* extended to/by the Other means that we are always responding even as we ask ourselves what we are responding to. This response to the *yes* also means that we are always choosing even as we ask ourselves what we are choosing. Similarly, the art of the perhaps is the condition of possibility of a decision taken and chosen. In short, the art of the perhaps counters hasty closures and totalizations. Instead, the challenge of the politics of the undecidable demands and insists that we move beyond the boundedness of racial, ethnic and gender enclosures all the while inhabiting the spaces of representation that moreover exemplify the art of the political that operates in the space of the 'perhaps'. These are the spaces that locate a possibilisation of the impossible, locating the poetics of the (im)possible.

For example, in terms of the agonism of the subject who desires to-be-come, what this means is the step towards the Beyond that is other to the claims of the past and the demands of present calculations of onto-spatial constitutions. This step to the Beyond represents the subject-in-formation who embraces an affirmative undecidability and writes 'in the passion of non-knowledge' (Derrida, 1995). As a practice of the invisible, this eschatological desire represents both a step towards the Otherness of the future to come and the desire for an otherwise of being. Such a step, that of an eschatological desire is the experience of the impossible as the 'not-yet' and the 'perhaps' that is heterogeneous and foreign to knowledge. This step to the Beyond, introduced by the invisibility of the Other, is the call to the impossible of the subject-in-formation who desires to-be-come, and who is haunted by the question: 'Who am I? What are we?' However, a writing in the dark acknowledges that this question of whether to be or not to be is ultimately not the question. A writing in the dark, as the experience of the limit is the experience of the impossible, which is also the experience of freedom, signaling the agonal capacity to move beyond

present onto-spatial constitutions, to imagine the Other differently. Writing on the experience or risk of 'freedom', Nancy notes:

> The experience of freedom is therefore the experience that *is* experience. It is the experience of experience. But the experience of experience is nothing other than experience itself: trying the self at the self's border, the immediate testing of the limit which consists equally in the tearing apart of immediacy by the limit, the passage of the limit, which passes nothing and which does not surpass itself, but which *happens*, in the sense that "*it happens*" [...] Experience is the experience of experience's difference in itself. Or rather: *experience is experience's difference,* it is the *peril* of the crossed limit that is nothing than the limit of essence (and therefore existence), the singular outline of shared being (Nancy, 1993: 86-87).

The deconstructive emphasis on the opening signaled by the Beyond is an aspect of the politics of the invisible and which is also opened to the experience of the impossible. For example, embracing ethical alterity moves us away from the constative statements that prescribes what ought to be and should be. To summarize, a politically disposed reading practice introduced and entailed by the alterity posed by the Silent Younger Daughter in *Lear* is also transferable to how we relate to the Other. We are responsible as we attempt to read and interpret the Other for a transformation: 'interpretation is transformation' (Cornell, 1992: 115). The desire to preserve the alterity of the Other as Other turns on the affirmation of the alterity of the Other. It is an affirmation to keep open to the Other and forms of Otherness and, for Derrida, this also includes the affirmation of the Otherness of the future to come, a justice to come and a community to come. But is also means preserving a future for the Other(s). Recall the central question of this chapter: how do we address and respond to the Other? The Other is by definition an Otherness we cannot inhabit. The alterity of the Other in this chapter's reading is something indecipherable and unknowable, which forces us to open ourselves to the multiple possibilities of alternate forms of engagements with Otherness. The affirmation of the Other, according to Derrida, forces us to respond to the Other in a radical way because the ethical relation has to deal with singularities. Because the alterity of the Other is always already singular, we have to deal with singular situations that resist precise

prescriptions. And because the Other calls for different responses in different situations, we enact a writing in the dark that is without pre-established rules of engagement and regulative ideals. Thus we need to remember that we are responsible as we interpret for the direction of that transformation. We cannot, according to Derrida, escape our responsibility which is implicit in every act of interpretation and which is the point being made in this politically disposed reading of the Silent Younger Daughter in *Lear*. Deconstruction, according to Derrida in *Force of Law*, and implicit in this politically disposed reading of the Younger Daughter, is justice.

Conclusion

> Someone, you or me, comes forward and says: *I would like to learn to live finally*. Finally but why? *To learn to live*: a strange watchword. Who would learn? From whom? To teach to live, but to whom? Will we ever know? Will we ever know how to live and first of all what 'to learn to live' means? And why finally?
>
> Jacques Derrida

Derrida has asked us to learn to live. What am 'I', what are 'We' to learn to live with? How are 'We' to learn to live? From whom do we learn and will we ever learn how to live? Will we ever know? To live necessarily involves learning to be. But to be also entails learning to live and to be with each other in the spirit of hospitality, friendship and justice. These questions of learning to live-with and being-with-others also recall the questions I asked myself in the introduction to this thesis where I started considering the question of living with Otherness, a question that surfaced when I encountered Fanon's ontological shock of dislocation, enacted in the epistemic violence of the gaze of an/Other. In my encounter with Fanon, I witness a violent and imperialistic way of being with and living with Otherness, introduced to me by Fanon's encounter with the colonial gaze. The relationship with the Other introduces the dimension of the political: it is the site of irreducible responsibility, and yet it is a responsibility that is often effaced or suppressed by violence. Unsettled by this violent way of being with Otherness, I am prompted to ask how do we live with and be with Otherness in a non-totalizable, responsible ethic and politics? Derrida's questions of learning to live return me again to this territory of learning to live-with and be-with Otherness, questions that permeate this thesis. Here, again, I ask, is not this learning to live always a question of learning to live-with the Other? And is not this being with and living with Otherness also a question of the ethical relation, justice and freedom associated and called forth by this disposition to Otherness? In the last chapter, for example, I explored how a politically disposed relation to the Other is a recognition of the opening of the relation to alterity and heterogeneity, which is crucial to the aspiration to enact the (im)possibility of the ethical relationship.

These questions of learning to live with and to be with Otherness are indicative of the opening of the ethical relation, the spaces of obligation. As Caputo indicates, this being-with-others is then

> the surface upon which you and I stand: the obligation I have to you (and you to me, but this is different) and the both of "us" to "others". Even the notion of "others" must be spread out and disseminated, so as to include not only other human beings but what is other than human – animals, e.g., or other living things generally, and even the earth itself [...] I mean the feeling that comes over us when others need our help, when they call out for help, or support, or freedom, or whatever they need, a feeling that grows in strength directly in proportion to the desperateness of the situation of the other. The power of obligation varies directly with the powerlessness of the one who calls for help, which is the power of the powerlessness (Caputo, 1993: 5).

This opening of a relation to the Other(s) who precedes us is, then, a question of debts and responsibilities opened up by the spaces of obligations demanded by and opened up by factical life. This opening of a radical relation to the Other is, as we saw in Chapter 4, a question of a writing in blindness. It is question of developing a radical relation posed by the challenge of radical alterity, of opening up to the Other(s) who are not the Same. This writing in blindness, the counterpart of which is the 'art of the perhaps', is, then, a question of an incessant, daily negotiation, of developing a critical vigilance wherein the 'I' and the 'We' commit to the Other, which is the opposite to the violent ethic of ontological totalitarianism explored in Chapter 2. Instead, compelled by an eschatological desire, provoked by the necessity of a writing in blindness, this opening to the Other is underpinned by the desire for a non-totalizing response to the Other. For Derrida, the relation to the Other is that of affirmation: it affirms the Other's right to be and this radical relation to the Other needs to avoid the temptations to reduce the Other to categories of imperialistic mastery, possession, totalisation and unconditioned certitude. As a form of eschatological desire, this relation to the Other, non-proprietorial in nature, thus opens up a space for the Other and gives the Other a future: 'my relation to the other is of a "relation without relation". It is a relation in which the other remains absolutely transcendent. I cannot reach the other. I cannot know the other from the inside and

so on. That is not an obstacle but the condition of love, of friendship, and of war too, a condition of the relation to the other' (Derrida, 1997b: 14). The Other, as Derrida reminds us, 'remains an other whose law demands the impossible' (Derrida, 1984a: 4) and this opening up of a radical relation to alterity and heterogeneity, as we have seen in Chapter 4, is also a question of eschatological desire. As a practice of the impossible, this relation to the Other, compelled by that of an eschatological desire, is thus also a question of ethical comportment accompanied by the associations of the incalculability of justice, of being faithful and responsible to the Other(s) in order to give Other(s) a future. For Derrida, the Other entails the impossible, which is the only possible invention, the invention that allows the in-coming of the Other: '[T]he condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: the testing of the aporia from which one may invent the only possible invention, the impossible invention' (Derrida, 1992b: 41).

This relation to the Other is also, as we saw Chapter 3, the opening of a poetics of the (im)possible, provoked by a desire to seek a radical relation to the radically non-relational. Learning to be-with the Other is, then, a question of taking up the challenge posed by a poetics of the (im)possible, compelled by a desire to affirm the Other, to imagine the Other differently thus opening a possibility for a re-figuration of a politics underpinned by the struggle to preserve alterity and heterogeneity and not the erasure or effacement of alterity or forms of Otherness. This question of living with and being with Otherness is also provoked by raising the question of the community of the 'We'. In raising the question of community, what is provoked is the poetics of obligation to Other(s) who are not the Same. The poetics put into play by *Desdemona* is thus an ethical gesture of welcoming the Other of the community. *Desdemona* allows me to understand how this poetics of the impossible, as a practice of the invisible, is directed toward affirming and imagining the Other(s) differently, the space that takes on the aporetic difficulties of articulating the 'not-yet' and the 'to-come', the space, then, where poetics, ethics and politics converge.

At stake in this opening of a relation to the Other(s) is an otherwise of the political sovereignty of the I Am Who I Am, construed in Chapter 2 as a sovereign political disposition that discloses a violent, proprietorial disposition toward alterity and

heterogeneity. As Cornell (1992) explains, this ontological totalitarianism is also homologous to 'the circle of the Absolute. The self-conscious recognition of the "we that is I and the I that is we", the coming home to oneself through the Other, is not only a description, but also a normative practice embodied in the institutions of right in a modern legal system' [...] The thinking of totality, for Levinas, carries within it the danger of totalitarianism because such a thinking would deny "actuality" to the Other "excluded" from the system' (Cornell, 1992: 65-66).

As we have seen, in asking us to live, in asking us to open a relation to the Other, Derrida has indicated that any discussion of who we are – the 'I', the 'You', the 'We' – is spectrally determined by an Otherness that traverses us and from which we cannot escape. As Dillon explains,

> What human is not a mortal and temporal being bearing the mark of difference within itself as that which makes itself possible, difference which does not merely individuate each human being as the individual self that it is, but which actively bears constitutively within itself? It is that difference which opens it up and opens it out – the spacing of time – as the responsive, receptive, projecting and communicating, plural and hybrid, temporal way of being-with-others, on the way from birth to death, each human being is. Who, in short, is not a bearer of this very strangeness of human being itself (Dillon, 1999: 118).

In confronting this otherness, this strangeness within the Self, the 'I' and the 'We' become questions unto ourselves. What is then at stake 'is a duty, an ethical duty, to take into account this impossibility of being one with oneself. It is because I am not one with myself that I can speak with the other and address the other. That is not a way of avoiding responsibility. On the contrary, it is the only way for me to take responsibility and to make decisions' (Caputo, 1997: 14). Thus construed, driven by the poetics of the (im)possible, and compelled by an eschatological desire, that of the desire to enact the ethical relation, all seeming knowability ends: 'the other puts an end, unceasingly, to the identification and to the assumption of the absolute, perfect understanding' (Nancy, 1996: 246). The challenge posed by the alterity of the Other is the undermining of perceptual faith, announcing the limits of the identification of the 'I' and the 'We'. It is only losing this sovereign epistemic self-

certifying certainty of the egological 'I' that opens up the possibilities of a politics that is attuned to non-assimilationist claims to difference and alterity: "[T]his 'I' questions its right to be, but only given its unquestionable and primary obligation to the other [...] Consequently, to be oneself is to be for the other' (Hand, 1989: 5). The crucial feature of this I Am Who May Be is the movement away from sovereign metaphysical politics, namely that of a totalitarian political disposition construed here as the 'homogenisation of all areas of human life into complete uniformity' (Critchley, 1993: 76).

In Chapter 4 I explored how a 'writing in blindness' requires learning how this living with Otherness also involves learning that the question of whether to be or not to be is finally not the ultimate question. Instead, it becomes a question of seeking and aspiring for a betterment of justice, of responsibility to the Other(s) and the accompanying ethical relation to the Other(s) who precede us. Indeed, this eschatological desire to enact the ethical relation, and its association with a poetics of the otherwise, moves away from an ontological totalitarian relation to Otherness. This requires the recognition that violence, always already there in metaphysical logocentric politics, means that there is no simple resolution to the problematic of being-with-others. For Derrida, this question of learning to live requires that we also learn to respond to and open up to the Other even as we open up to a responsibility to the Other in all its unknowability and non-thematizability. And because the Other is non-thematizable, our relation and opening to the Other(s) for whom we are always-already responsible has to take the form of a writing in the dark.

In short, this learning to live with and be with Others is a question of seeking a radical relation with the Other and forms of otherness. It is relation that cannot be thought of 'finally', not a 'relation' as finality, a relation that is, instead, open to the infinite, opening up a space that allows the Other to come. Such a relation could be thought of as a passion for/of the impossible. Because the relation to the Other(s) is, for Derrida, infinite, incalculable and impossible, this relation takes on a non-eschatological messianic structure. As Caputo explains:

> As soon as you address the other, as soon as you are open to the future, as soon as you have a temporal experience of waiting for the future, of waiting for someone to come: that is the opening of experience.

> Someone is to come, is *now* to come. Justice and peace will have to do with this coming of the other, with the promise. Each time I open my mouth, I am promising something. When I speak to you, I am telling you that I promise to tell you something, to tell you the truth. So the promise is not just one speech act among others; every speech act is fundamentally a promise. This universal structure of the promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice – that is what I call the messianic structure (Caputo, 1997: 22-23).

*

Learning to live with the Other. Learning to open to and be-with the Other. If a politics of the visible can be thought as a management and securing of alterity, the securing of which makes possible an unconditional rational cognition of Otherness, then what is the otherwise of this form of politics? These are the difficult questions that this thesis addresses. I explored this 'relation' to the Other by seeking the political dispositions lurking within the practices of vision. While the thesis was set to work by the initial point of departure, that of the question, 'what are the politics of the gaze?', it was broadened out in Chapter 1 to consider the questions: 'what are the practices of vision?'. But in pursuing this question in subsequent chapters, the question regarding the practices of vision was again broadened out when I asked: 'what is the political disposition lurking within the practices of the visible and invisible?'

In Chapter 1, the exploration initially took the form of seeking to understand the practices of vision. This initial questioning of the practices of vision took its initial guidance and co-ordinates from Homi Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan. These thinkers' mode of thinking the practices of vision formed the point of departure for subsequent chapters even though the questions posed in these later chapters took their cue increasingly from the deconstructive thought of Derrida. However, while Bhabha, Lefebvre, Lacan and Foucault are not visibly in the foreground of these later chapters, they do form the enabling undercurrents for my subsequent thinking regarding the politics of the visible and invisible as it relates to subjectivity and spatiality. In short, Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan locate my initial point of

contact with the practices of vision, forming the springboard for my subsequent exploration of the political dispositions to Otherness lurking within the practices of the visible and invisible. It is also from Bhabha, Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan that I took my cue and point of departure to explore the politics of vision, including the political subjectivity, lurking within colonial spatial thought and colonial worlding (Chapter 2), the critical ontology, and its associated relation to Otherness underpinning representational spaces and the incommensurability-vision of heterotopias (Chapter 3) and the spaces of obligation to otherness opened up by the encounter with an invisibility, an alterity that undermines our perceptual faith and self-certifying egological 'I' (Chapter 4).

In Chapter 1, Bhabha's conceptualization of the colonial gaze formed the initial point of departure for my exploration of Foucault, Lefebvre and Lacan. Bhabha's mode of thinking the colonial gaze is encoded with Foucault and Lacan, and together with his thinking of spatiality, this afforded me an opportunity to re-visit these continental thinkers. In Bhabha, I encountered a mode of thinking the colonial gaze that was suggestive of practices of the visible by which colonial surveillance produces definable and calculable subject-positions for colonial governmentality. Bhabha's mode of thinking colonial relations of power makes available an understanding of how colonial power relations are exercised not merely in the sphere of economic exploitation and territorial appropriation, but also in regimes of representational practices that make possible subject-constituting effects. Foucault also enhanced my understanding of how relations of power are enacted in the sphere of visual regimes. Specifically, he makes available a comprehension of how power relations as they are exercised within the surveillant gaze are entwined with visibility practices that are associated with the effort to distribute, arrange, demarcate and secure bodies in space. Foucault's conceptualization of the practices of resistance and of the incommensurability-vision of heterotopias contributes to my subsequent understanding of practices of the invisible. In Chapter 3, I pursue and expand on this line of thought by suggesting that underpinning heterotopias is the agonism of critical ontology. The ethic put into play by *Desdemona*'s representational space was crucial in helping me understand the agonism of critical ontology of heterotopias. But *Desdemona* also helped me understand an aspect of the politics of the invisible, namely, the apophaticism of poetics. Together with my reading of Lefebvre's

representational space in Chapter I, which also provides another point of departure for Chapter 3, I suggest that the representational space of *Desdemona* locates the space where the question of learning to be-with-others is posed. In Chapter 3, I asked: what is the ethic put into play by TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*?

In contrast to the official and elite state securing of the multicultural community of the 'We', I suggest that, as a representational space, TheatreWorks' *Desdemona* locates a critique to the official encoding of the 'We'. As a performance-as-critique of the official encoding of the 'We' of community, *Desdemona*'s intercultural process-based performance situates another form of thinking the community. By posing the community of the question, this form of thinking the community is in direct contrast to Singaporean multiculturalism, itself an organization and division of peoples into visible, calculable and representable defined groupings within a panoptic field of vision – a multiculturalism-as-containment-of-difference. In contrast, instead of conforming to the visibility politics of Singaporean multiculturalism, *Desdemona*, I suggest, localizes the inoperative community that Jean-Luc Nancy speaks of. As a performance, *Desdemona* crystallizes a thinking through of a practice of the invisible, that of poetics which offers a different figuration of politics and a re-imagination of being-with-otherness. As a representational space that locates poetics, *Desdemona* poses the community of the question, a community as ceaseless, open-ended process. *Desdemona*, in short, offers an understanding of how the agonistic critical ontology of representational spaces might offer spaces, no matter how provisional or tentative these spaces are, where ethics, politics and poetics might converge. In a representational space where each performer becomes an Other, where the 'I' and the 'We' are put into question, we are also invited to enter into an Otherness: '[P]oetics [...] serves ethics by enabling each of us to be beyond ourself, to be with the other and to come back to ourself as if to another. To imagine the other is to imagine *differently*. It is, in itself, an ethical gesture of welcoming what is different' (Kearney , 1995: xvi).

As a performance of the community of the question, I suggest in Chapter 3 that *Desdemona*'s representational space locates an apophaticism of poetics. *Desdemona* asks the questions 'Who are "We"? What are "We"?' without wanting to reduce the answer to that question into a determinate decidability, without wanting to

fall back on the temptations of the onto-theological desire to know and to be absolutely. Writing on community, Derrida (1978a) suggests that a possible way of thinking the community is that of a community of the question. As a form of being with the Other, the community of the question represents the radical opening to the Other of community and the community-to-come which calls for a hospitality and the opening of a just relation to the Other. As Caputo explains it, '[T]he sense of European identity and community, of any community [...] consists in "opening itself without being able any longer to gather itself" to the heading of the other, and beyond that, to something otherwise than a heading. Any possible future community that Derrida could live with would be open to an other that is not *its* other, not the other whom one is intent on colonizing, open and exposed to "that which is not, never was, and never will be Europe"' (Caputo, 1997: 122). As a community of the question, this community-to-come is founded on confronting the aporetic difficulties of living with the responsibilities opened up in the space of obligation when we encounter Otherness, a space opened up by the plurality of bodies and the poetics of obligation called forth by the inevitable encounter with alterity and differences in factical life. By refusing a premature closure to the question of who are 'We' of the community, the community of the question opens up a radical relation with the radical non-relational. It is a process compelled by the struggle for and on behalf of alterity. *Desdemona* thus represents the springboard for my attempts to think through these questions, namely, the relationship between poetics, the community of the question, and the ethical relation posed by the question of being-with-others. By opening up a space where I can start considering the apophaticism of poetics, the gift given to me by *Desdemona* is that a community of the question is also a non-closure to that question. A community of the question is a promise of a community-to-come. A community of the question is compelled by the poetics of possibility, of the possibility of better approximations, an agonistic space incited by an eschatological desire to strive for the endless betterment of thinking the 'We' who wish to learn to live with the Other and forms of otherness. As Derrida writes:

> A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A

> community of the decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found a language it has decided to seek, is not sure of its own possibility within the community. A community of the question of the possibility of the question. This is very little – almost nothing (Derrida, 1978a: 80).

In Chapter 3, while I suggest that *Desdemona*'s inoperative community introduces us to a radicalized multiculturalism, one that is figured as a radical relation to a community as *partage*, some might however argue that this radical way of being with the Otherness, that of a unity-in-distinction and difference-in-unity, also raises difficult questions. Some might perhaps suggest that this form of the inoperative community also contains the possibility of dissent, of antagonistic and possibly violent relationships between different and potentially incommensurable identities. Recall my guiding questions in Chapter 3, provoked by the question of the ethic put into play by *Desdemona*: how do 'I', how do 'We' relate to and affirm the otherness of the Other? Is it even possible? Will 'We' or 'I' ever know or comprehend the Other of community? How do 'We', how do 'I' extend a hand of friendship to the foreigner, the stranger and the alien? After all, some might ask, is not the basis of community one of friendship and a mutuality of comprehension and understanding, of being in common? But as Derrida indicates,

> we cannot, and we *must* not, exclude the fact that when someone is speaking, in private or in public, when one teaches, publishes, preaches, orders, promises, prophesies, informs or communicates, some force in him or her is also striving not to be understood, approved, accepted in consensus (Derrida, 1997: 218).

In other words, the desire of wanting to be understood is haunted by the undecidable, by the possibility of not understanding or the possibility that the Other will not be understood or does not wish to be understood. But this desire for the mutuality of comprehension is also, as Derrida indicates, always already open to the aleatory that skews sense and comprehension, the possibility of *destinerrance*, the possibility that the letter might fail to reach its destination. In short, to be radically open to the Other-to-come means that there is no way of programming mutual understanding, no protection from the possibility of antagonism or misunderstanding. There is no fail-safe method, no ready-made road-map to ensure against this.

Instead, because 'We' are haunted by the undecidable and have to open up to the risks that Otherness brings, we have to enact a writing in blindness that recalls the 'must' of the asymmetry of the ethical relation. As Derrida also explains,

> [W]hether or not the other answers, in one way or another, no mutuality, no harmony, no agreement can or must reduce the infinite disproportion [...] the desire of disproportion which gives without return and without recognition must be able not to count on 'proper agreement', not to calculate assured, immediate or full comprehension (Derrida, 1997: 220).

For Derrida, just as 'We' can never finally say or gather together the self-coinciding 'We', namely that no community can ever enjoy full consensus, homogeneity and self-identity, all of which are suspect politics for Derrida, similarly it also holds that the 'I' can never say 'I', that I am never fully self-coinciding without some internal strangeness and difference, an undecidability. Similarly, this is the relation called for and opened up by the desire to enact a just and responsible relation to Otherness. There is always a structural blindness, a structural possibility of misunderstanding between the 'I', the 'We' and forms of Otherness. Thus, the condition of possibility of a radical way of being with the Other and forms of Otherness, a way of being compelled by the desire for justice, for friendship, for hospitality is thus always already haunted by the politics of the undecidable which is the condition of a radical openness to the foreigner and the stranger.

I am not suggesting in Chapter 3 that TheatreWorks' intercultural performance practices provide the only alternative to multiculturalism, or, that the practices and ideals of multiculturalism should be discarded. I am not suggesting that intercultural practices are the only possible affirmative way of being-with-others which overcomes all previous 'distortions' of being-with-others. Rather, I suggest that the interculturalism of *Desdemona* represents one instance where we witness a radicalization of multiculturalism by posing the question of the 'We'. And I am adamantly not suggesting that this critique of Singaporean multiculturalism represents a critique of heterogeneity with the accompanying call to return to an ethnically homogeneous civic space. Instead, I hope what comes across clearly in Chapter 3 is that by posing the community of the question, what is opposed instead is the violent ethic, associated with a form of securing and managing alterity and

heterogeneity. As indicated, *Desdemona* poses the question of the 'We' and the related question of our relationship and disposition to alterity and otherness. However, while performances in Singapore are increasingly one of the crucial representational spaces where we witness Singaporeans contesting, debating and reflecting on issues of identity, community, subjectivity, colonial history and ideas of belonging, these spaces are not to be construed as simple ideological expressions, oriented towards supporting another apparatus of power-knowledge and ideology. Nor am I suggesting that performances such as *Lear* and *Desdemona* are manifestations of the 'people's will'. Instead, perhaps what *Desdemona* represents, at the very minimum, is what Bhabha refers to as 'those easily obscured, but highly significant recesses of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and oppositional analytic capacities may emerge' (Bhabha, 1990: 3).

In chapter 3, I locate one instance of visibility politics, namely postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism. In Chapter 2, I glimpse another form of visibility politics, that of the production of a political subjectivity inherent to colonial stereotypical discourses and colonial worlding. The ethic explored in Chapter 2 is that of a violent ethic, of a violent way of being toward the Other, namely, ontological totalitarianism.

In Chapter 2, I locate and explore the question of the politics lurking within the practices of the visible in Singaporean colonial relations. I do this because Bhabha suggests, albeit elliptically, that vision, underpinned by an epistemic violence, is 'complicit with a Western metaphysic of Man' which is also accompanied by the 'displacement of the colonial relation' (Bhabha, 1997: 42). This curiosity and the urge to explore this remark, particularly Bhabha's construal of the complicitous relation between vision and the Western metaphysic of Man, was also heightened by a remark made by Spivak. She had suggested that colonial representational politics made possible the consolidation of 'the self of Europe by obliging the native to cathect the space of the Other on his home ground' (Spivak, 1985: 133). Such was the epistemic violence inherent to this worlding of the Self of Europe, that, as Spivak argues, this worlding was a worlding of the space of an Other, 'which is far from uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging them [the native] to domesticate the alien as Master' (Spivak, 1985: 133). Thus, I asked: what is the political disposition

underpinning the colonial politics of the visible? Secondly, and relatedly, I also asked myself, what are the politics lurking within colonial worlding? This desire to explore the politics of colonial worlding was also propelled by the visceral shock of encounter with the epistemic violence implicit in the inscription beneath the Raffles statue which I used as a point of departure for my exploration. Consequently, as a way of being with the Other, I suggest that colonial visibility politics as they were read through in the colonial Singaporean context was an impoverished way of being with the Other.

For the purposes of Chapter 2, I arrive at this understanding by turning to colonial photographs and colonial travel narratives. In doing so, I glimpse a political rhetoric put to work by colonial stereotypical discourses. I suggest that as a practice of the visible, the colonial politics set to work by colonial stereotypical discourse are also forms of identity-securing practices. As a means of securing uncertainty, while this mode of calculative-representative thought entails a political mastery of Otherness, it is also associated with the project of a theologic-political subjectivity that takes the form of securing the I Am Who I Am, a subjectivity made possible by the displacement of the colonial relation. This displacement is made possible, for example, by the inscription of colonized space as *terra nullis*, a representation of space in which the colony is registered as the imprint bearer, the supplementary vessel for the consolidation of the European sovereign and subject, even as it constituted the colony as Other for the purposes of administration. Lurking within visibility politics is that of a metaphysical sovereign politics, a violent way of being in the world and being with Others, characterized as a hostility towards alterity and Otherness and propelled by the imperialistic and proprietorial process of securing other spaces and bodies. As a way of being with Otherness, visibility politics approaches the relationship between the Self and Other on the Self's own terms, the opposite of the asymmetrical ethical relation spoken of by both Derrida and Levinas. In an onto-theologic proprietorial mastery of Otherness, the egological self-certifying certainty of I Am Who I Am is thus opposed to the other form of ethic played out and posed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, the question of the relation to the Other and forms of Otherness is posed. This question of the relation to the Other takes the form of approaching the Other via eschatological desire, a relation where the Other takes precedence over the Self. Rather than a political subjectivity circumscribed by a practice of the visible, itself betraying a thinking circumscribed by the totality and the

reduction of the Other to selfsameness, this other relation to Otherness is underpinned by eschatological desire. And because this relation to Otherness is compelled by a passion for the impossible, the approach to Otherness thus takes a form of a writing in blindness.

As was intimated in Chapter 4, a politically disposed reading practice of the Other and of forms of otherness, one that is provoked by the thought of Derrida, introduces us to the politics of the invisible. As a practice of eschatological desire, the political disposition entailed by the politics of the invisible is one that introduces an infinite openness to the Beyond. That is to say, this eschatological desire compels a radical relation to the radical non-relational, of the Other to-come; this desire is a relation with an otherwise of thought, 'beyond the totality' and which breaches the totality of the Same (Levinas, 1994: 22-23). However, this radical relation with the invisible Other is not one that is deliberately opposed to the intelligible. Rather, because it resists codifying, as a practice of eschatological desire, the invisible takes place at the limits of the intelligible. This is not to suggest that the invisible is in a Manichean opposition to the visible. Rather, as was suggested, the invisible haunts the visible as its very possibility and takes place at the limits of the intelligible and calculable.

By opposing the violent ethic of ontological totalitarianism, as an aspect of the practices of the invisible, this eschatological desire to enact the relation to Otherness takes the form of an asymmetric relation between the Self and Other. As indicated in Chapter 4, the Other is the one to whom I am hostage and the alterity of the Other puts me immediately under an obligation of unconditional hospitality and responsibility: '[T]he other facing me makes me responsible for him/her, and this responsibility has no limit' (Peperzak, 1993: 22). As was indicated, the radical relation to the radical alterity of the Other poses the question of responsibility: the Other inaugurates responsibility and also the impossibility of its representation. The responsibility to the Other is infinite:

> Responsibility for the Other, for the naked face of the first individual to come along. A responsibility that goes beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other or whatever acts I may or may not have committed, as if I were devoted to the other man before being devoted to myself. Or more exactly, as if I had to answer for the other's death even

> before being. A guiltless responsibility, whereby I am none the less open to an accusation of which no alibi, spatial or temporal, could clear me. It is as if the Other established a relationship or a relationship were established whose whole intensity consists in not presupposing the idea of community (Levinas, 1989a: 83-84).

The Other puts me under an (im)possible ethical obligation of responsibility and hospitality before I am even capable of making a rational, analytic judgment on the specific identity of the Other. This is because the radical difference of the Other remains infinite, 'transcendent', infinitely foreign and exterior. The radical alterity of the Other introduces an epiphany and breaches the world that is common to the 'We' and the 'I'. Such is the eschatological desire inherent in the politics of the invisible that rather than trying to impose my or our rationality on the Other, my or our attitude is one of absolute openness and hospitality. It is indeed a difficult politics. As suggested in Chapter 4, confronted by the Other and forms of Otherness, and because our relationship to the Other, if it is to remain ethical and just, should not define meanings in advance in order to enframe definitively the only possible way to approach Otherness. A politically disposed reading practice opened up by Otherness, if it is to be just and radical, would want to resist the desire for premature closures. Instead, what is opened up by the desire to keep open a non-eschatological relation to the Other is that of a writing in blindness underpinned by the art of the perhaps.

In pursuing these questions of the political dispositions underpinning the practices of the visible and invisible and the associated relationship to the Other and forms of otherness, and of how these relations are variously construed, effaced, enacted in those constitutive practices of the visible and invisible, the thesis contributes to the existing scholarly literature in postcolonial studies and studies that draw on the thought of Derrida. The thesis explores the relationship to the Other via the politics of vision and locates its investigation within the context of Singapore; thus contributing to the postcolonial theorization of representational politics in terms of the different enactments of subjectivity, the politics underlying the formation of a postcolonial multicultural community and the possibilities of problematizing this form of securing the community.

The present study has chosen to explore and locate the productions of political subjectivities, as they are enacted in different forms of relating to Otherness, in the politics and practices of the visible and invisible. It diverges from other postcolonial scholarly analysis by locating this investigation of the politics of vision in colonial and postcolonial Singapore, a research project that, as far as I know, has not been undertaken elsewhere. This research into the practices of vision as they are construed in colonial power relations and postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism makes available a different construal of the 'relation' to Otherness. The thesis is positioned in ethico-political terms made possible by the thought of Derrida, which permeates the arguments here. As is undoubtedly apparent now, the thesis thus concentrates on the relationship to Otherness and seeks a radical relation with the radically non-relational.

In addition, the thesis diverges from other scholarly analyses of Singaporean multiculturalism in that it has chosen to explore the critiques of the securing of the multicultural 'We' in the representational spaces of TheatreWorks' performances. As we saw in Chapter 3, while scholarly literature undoubtedly exists in terms of critiques of Singaporean multiculturalism, these critiques have concentrated firstly, on national identity.[1] Secondly, and crucially, these scholarly analyses have also called for the recognition that postcolonial Singaporean multiculturalism should be placed within the larger political and historical framework of colonial relations of power.[2] These analyses are undoubtedly important, and they have provided this thesis with the point of departure with which to consider the other picture that has largely been occluded from existing scholarly analyses, that of postcolonial intercultural performances read through a politically disposed reading practice that draws on the thought of Derrida. In short, while cultural, sociological and journalistic analyses have explored Singaporean performances vis-à-vis the politics of identity, and the question of national culture and identity, what remained to be explored, and what was previously occluded, were the intersections between intercultural practice,

---

[1] One could tum to, for example, the work of Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat (2000) 'Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues', 'Singaporeans ingesting McDonalds' (Chua, 2000a) or C.J.W.L-Wee (1995) 'Contending Primordialism: The Modern Construction of Postcolonial Singapore'.

[2] See for example, Ang and Stratton (1995) 'The Singaporean Way of Multiculturalism' and Ang and Stratton 91995a) 'Straddling East and West'. Also, see for example, PuruShotam (1998) 'Disciplining Difference: Race in Singapore'.

the ethic put into play in these intercultural representational spaces and the practices and politics of vision localized in these performances. It is at these intersections that the thesis makes its contributions.

What was significantly omitted before, perhaps an oversight, was an investigation of the political subjectivity underpinning these stereotypical discourses. Moreover, while invaluable work has been produced with regard to colonial spatial practices in colonial Singapore[3], what was neglected was the investigation of the political subjectivity regarding colonial worlding, the exercise of which makes possible the worlding of a political subjectivity construed in Chapter 2 as the I Am Who I Am. As I have indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, what drove and initiated my curiosity about the politics lurking within colonial spatial thought and the accompanying politics of vision lurking within this thought were the invaluable points of departure provided by Bhabha, Spivak, Lefebvre and Foucault. Chapter 2 represents the investigation of this curiosity.

However, certain issues and difficult questions have undoubtedly surfaced in the thesis. These concern the issue of hyperessentiality and the question of criteria which is also related to the affirmative tone adopted. I will address the question of hyperessentialism first.

*

In chapter 3, I suggest that the opening of a relation to the Other, in the form of a radical relation to the radical non-relational, could be coordinated by a desire for the otherwise. I suggest that the ethic put into play by *Desdemona* is an opening of a radical relation to Otherness which is an apophaticism of poiesis. Now, it could be argued that this apophaticism, a way of affirming and opening up a radical relation to the radical alterity of Otherness, could be construed as a form of hyperessentialism.

While both deconstruction and the deconstructive thought underpinning the apophaticism of poetics are posed as a thinking at the limits, the apophaticism of

---

[3] See for example the work of Brenda Yeoh (1996) 'Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore'

poetics is not a negative theology. As was suggested in Chapter 3, the apophaticism of poetics entailed by a deconstructive ethos is the opening up of a poetics of the (im)possible, set to work by a passion for the impossible, for the promise of a something *to come*, just because it does not exist (yet) as it is essentially always to come. As an incommensurability-vision, a poetics of the (im)possible is thus incited by the desire to find a radical relation to the radical non-relational, to opening the present up to the future community-to-come, to hospitality and to the advent of justice.

The apophaticism that Chapter 3 spoke of is derived from Derrida's understanding of the apophatic. While it shares a similarity with the general structure of a negative theological mode of thinking, the apophaticism of poetics, like that of differ*a*nce and *khora*, is not the God of negative theology. For Derrida, the apophaticism of negative theology cannot escape onto-theological determinations because negative theology is always in pursuit of a hyperessentiality (*hyperousious*). The negative theological denial accompanying apophaticism is, for Derrida, always already in the service of a kataphatic determination of what is 'proper' to God, the ultimate radical alterity of Otherness. For Derrida, the apophaticism of negative theological discourse is concerned with a '*hyperousious*' and has recourse to negations with the ultimate purpose being another way of affirming and construing the proper name of a super-essential Being. The apophaticism of negative theology, for Derrida, is 'always concerned with disengaging superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being' (Derrida, 1982: 6). As Derrida suggests, the apophaticism of negative theological discourse is still a way of tracking down the transcendental signifier, some Being beyond being, and this is not Derrida's search.

The apophatic voyage undertaken by negative theological discourse is always, for Derrida, guided by the promise of a return to presence. For example, Derrida's discussion of Meister Eckhart suggests this desire for a return to a super-being beyond Being and the God of Meister Eckhart

> is still determined as the essence-of-the-threefold-God. And when Meister Eckhart seeks to go beyond these determination, the movement

> which he sketches seems to remain enclosed in ontic transcendence. 'When I said that God was not a Being and was above Being, I did not contest his Being.' This negative theology is still a theology and, in its literality at least, it is concerned with liberating and acknowledging the ineffable transcendence of an infinite existent, 'Being above Being and superessential negation' [...] this is why, here (with differance), when the thought of Being goes beyond the ontic determinations it is not negative theology, nor even a negative theology (Derrida, 1978a: 146).

As Derrida reminds us, deconstruction and the deconstructive ethos is not to be conflated with or mistaken for a negative theology. Lurking within the apophaticism of negative theological discourse is a mode of thinking an apocalyptic time, namely, the possibility of realizing an eschatological future. In contrast, the apophaticism of Derrida's mode of thinking is one that leans toward a messianic eschatology – of the hospitality and responsibility accorded to the Other to-come (*avenir*). As Derrida reminds us, messianic eschatology, like that of differance, has no arche, no telos and makes no ontological claims.

Because it is circumscribed by a thinking at the limit, the apophaticism of poetics is a form of 'unsaying', an eschatological desire for the otherwise which speaks of a desire for the *tout autre* in contrast to the apophaticism of negative theology which is predicated on the hospitality of the *tout autre* toward us. For Derrida, and likewise Levinas, it is impossible to speak for and on behalf of the hospitality afforded us by the *tout autre* as we can only speak of and concern ourselves with our own responsibilities toward Otherness and never with the Other's responsibilities toward us.

As was suggested in Chapter 3, the apophaticism of poetics is a 'productive act beholden to something beyond itself' (Kearney, 1995: xiii) and is compelled by an ethic that is opened up to a passion for the impossible. But, because poetics recall the 'must', because it is accompanied by the undecidable, "the poetic contributes towards replenishing the ethical energy which 'the must' demands of us, in a world in which we are habitually preoccupied with oneself and the everyday" (Dillon, 1996: 201). As a form of writing in blindness, the apophaticism of poetics is 'written in the

passion of non-knowledge rather than the secret' (Derrida, 1991a: 75) and is a passion for the impossible. Compelling the apophaticism of poetics is the desire to imagine Other(s) differently and the ethic put into play is the radical openness afforded to the in-coming of the Other, for the infinite betterment of justice-to-come and a community-to-come. As Critchley usefully explains, 'Derrida is particularly anxious to distinguish democracy-to-come from any idea of a *future* democracy, where, where the future would be a modality of presence, namely the not-yet-present. Democracy-to-come is *not* to be confused with the living present of liberal democracy [...] but *neither* is it a regulative ideal [...] the experience of justice as the here and now *is* the *a venir* of democracy [...] the temporality of democracy is *advent*, it is futural, but it is happening *now*, it happens [...] as the messianic now blasting through the continuum of the present' (Critchley, 2000: 463). The apophaticism of poetics, then, underpinned by a thinking at the limit is the desire to open to the possibility of the otherwise, to imagine differently, which is anything but a return to hyperessentialism.

*

The next question I want to deal with briefly is the question of criteria, which is related to the affirmative tone adopted to Otherness. Admittedly, this is a difficult question but nevertheless one that always raises its head. This question of criteria emerges from the question of a radical relation, posed by the challenge of the non-eschatological openness to the radical alterity of Otherness, the requirement of which is one of hospitality and responsibility without limit. In other words, as a form of eschatological desire, is a politics of the invisible possible? And because it is construed as a radical openness to Otherness, is such a politics possible? After all, some might argue that a writing in blindness, that which is open to radical alterity and to the surprise of the Other to come is also haunted by the possibility of the arrival of the stranger as enemy, of the Other(s) who might mean us harm. And this question of criteria is often provoked by radical difference and heterogeneity that cannot be assimilated, which undermines the perceptual faith of the community of the 'We'. Such is the measure of the radical alterity of the Other that this encounter with Otherness, with radical difference, is often one of non-encounter, non-recognition and anxiety especially when the alterity of the Other is resistant to meaning and

undermines the perceptual faith of the *sujet suppose savoir*. In short, some might ask, 'how do we distinguish between the Other as friend and the Other as the foe who means us harm?'

As Derrida indicates, this question of the identification of the radical difference of the Other has to keep open instead radical Otherness if we are to keep open a radical relation to the Other. The radical difference of Otherness, the unidentifiable character of alterity, beyond and at the limit of the horizons of intelligibility, of calculability and anticipation is one where Otherness calls for the impossible because

> The Other, that is; God and no matter who [...] as soon as every other is wholly other. For the most difficult, indeed the impossible, dwells there: there where the other loses his name or is able to change it in order to become no matter what other (Derrida, 1995c:74).

As was suggested in Chapter 4, if 'mine', or if 'our' decision to open up to a responsibility toward the Other were simply 'ours', or 'mine', it would not be a just, or responsible decision. If my decision follows from what I am, my subjectivity, this would not be a decision as it is mine. And for a decision to be responsible, it must be the Other's; this form of decision is that of a writing in blindness. If my desire for the Other were simply my desire, I would be enclosed in my desire, and which is opposed to that aspect of the politics of the invisible, that of eschatological desire. The mark of the eschatological openness underpinning the relation to Otherness is the (im)possibility of ethics. As Cornell suggests more eloquently, '[T]he possibility of the ethical lies in its impossibility; otherwise the ethical would be reduced to the actual, to the totality of what is. This paradoxical formulation, in other words, is necessary if we are to respect the otherness of the Other [...] the ethical is a necessity as well as an impossibility – a necessity in that the remain(s) cannot totally be evaded even if they need not be heeded. The Other remain(s). The call to responsibility is prior to our subjectivity, prior to our choice. We may not answer, but we are not free to simply silence the call' (Cornell, 1992: 83-84). What this means is that this relation to the Other, while it is compelled by the radical openness of eschatological desire, is also one in which 'my', 'our' responsibility is absolute. This mode of thinking the ethical relation is, then, opposite to the ethical command, one without pre-established rules and codes of conduct but, while this form of ethics does not decree rules of conduct, "for Levinas, [...] it is ethics – as 'the extreme sensitivity

of one subjectivity to another', the heteronomous responsibility of our subjectivity – which governs morality" (Campbell and Dillon, 1993: 171).

In short, a writing in blindness, that of a radical relation to the radical alterity of the Other, if it is to be radical enough, is compelled by an unconditional openness to the Other and to forms of otherness, regardless of what the Other is going to bring. As Derrida explains:

> I must be unprepared, or prepared to be unprepared, for the unexpected arrival of *any* other. Is this possible? I don't know. If, however, there is pure hospitality, or a pure gift, it should consists in this opening without horizon, without horizon of expectation, an opening to the newcomer whoever that may be. It may be terrible because the newcomer may be a good person, or may be the devil; but if you exclude the possibility that the newcomer is coming to destroy your house – if you want to control this and exclude in advance this possibility – there is no hospitality (Derrida, 1999: 70).

Derrida advocates, in short, an unconditional hospitality to alterity and the Other to-come. When 'We' restrict hospitality in order to ward off the potentially unacceptable behaviour of the stranger or the future to come, 'We' take control of the situation. In doing so, 'We', the host, also determine, to a degree, what 'We' want the Other or the community-to-come to be like. However, a messianic eschatology compels a radically disposed openness to the advent of a messianic future. As soon as we try to determine what the Other is, or what the future holds, Derrida believes that we become restrictive in our hospitality to the Other(s) and thus undo the radical alterity of the Other by recasting it/him/her in our own image, namely the transubstantiation of the infinity of the Other to the totality of the Same. Such a reduction, to put it simply, returns us to the metaphysical totalitarian politics of the visible. Only unconditional hospitality, Derrida believes, is adequate to avoiding the potential violence of concrete messianicisms. This is because Derrida's conceptualization of unconditional hospitality stems from his desire for the advent of Justice, a democracy-to-come, all of which is compelled by a desire to keep open a messianic future. Moreover, in his concern to safeguard this future from an apocalyptic eschatological thinking, associated with the possibility of the potential violence of concrete messianicism, Derrida distinguishes his messianic future from that of

particular messianicism. As Derrida indicates in *Faith and Knowledge* (1998), the faith required by messianic eschatology belongs to a 'general structure of experience', a 'messianicity without messianicism [...] the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration. The coming of the other can only emerge as a singular event when no anticipation sees it coming, when the other and death – and radical evil – can come as a surprise at any moment. Possibilities that both open and can always interrupt history, or at least the ordinary course of history' (Derrida, 1998: 17). In other words, the eschatological desire underpinning Derrida's messianic eschatology is one that takes on the 'general structure' of messianic experience, but does not depend on the apocalyptic thinking inherent to concrete messianicisms which are dependent on a teleological disposition: '[T]his messianic dimension does not depend upon any messianicism, it follows no determinate revelation, it belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion' (Derrida, 1998: 18). This is also because concrete messianicism, due to the particularity of its eschatological vision, implies a conditional hospitality to Otherness and hence, leads to the potential of violences, of fundamentalisms. In contrast, Derrida's messianic eschatology is one without content – a religion without religion.

This messianic eschatological disposition, while it is underpinned by an eschatological desire and openness to the Other to come, still requires that we act, and requires that we do not shirk our responsibilities to the Other(s). Our responsibilities to Otherness have to be acknowledged and embraced here and now: '[T]here is no passivity or quietism entailed in this affirmation. We can act. We do act. All the time' (Campbell and Dillon, 1993:172). This requirement to act, as Derrida explains, also 'means that there is some inadequation between the now and now. He is coming now; the messianic does not wait. This is a way of waiting for the future, right now. The responsibilities that are assigned to us by this messianic structure are responsibilities for here and now. The Messiah is not some future present; it is imminent and it is this imminence that I am describing under the name of messianic structure' (Derrida, 1997b: 24).

To return to the difficult questions posed earlier: Is a politics of the invisible, compelled by the desire to open up a radical relation to the Other and forms of

otherness possible? Is a writing in the dark possible especially when that opens us to the possibility of the stranger who means us harm?

As indicated, this question of producing a criteria is often provoked when we confront radical difference that cannot be assimilated. As Dillon also explains, '[T]he "truly other" here is other only, however, in terms of its relation to the subject' (Dillon, 1999: 129). And this question of criteria and the identity of the Other of community, as to whether this Other is friend or foe, is often provoked because 'of the way the identity of the community is itself conceived (ideally as a sovereign, "organized political entity, internally peaceful, territorially enclosed and impenetrable to aliens"), fundamentally threatened, and offended by difference, which establishes the requirement to draw friend/enemy distinction' (Dillon, 1999: 129). What is also at stake, in short, is that this question of the criteria and the subsequent urge to identify the proper identity of radical difference (whether it is the enemy or the friend) is also a question of the community of the 'We' because, as Dillon indicates, what this comes down to is that

> [I]f the political community is only to be established upon the basis of being able to identify the enemy, it follows that we must establish enemies, or we cannot found a political community. Otherness has to be a mortal threat to the sovereign subject, even if it is constitutively installed within the subject itself. Moreover, the foundation of the political community must take place here outside the law because Schmitt concedes that there is no law that tells you who the friend or who the enemy is, or where and when conflicts over the very life and character of the political community will arise [...] This is a politicized way of denying any belonging together of human being in its apartness. If the question of friend or enemy appears to be an exceptional one because it arises outside the law, it is nonetheless also a mundane obsessive one because such a subject must continuously review the difference within itself, as well as between itself and other subjects, so as to constitute and preserve itself as a single sovereign unitary subject. In the process of pursuing and seeking to realize such an understanding of what it is to be a subject, it is condemned to make an enemy of itself (Dillon, 1999: 130).

As Chapter 4 suggested, this relation to radical difference calls for an invention of the impossible opened up by a writing in blindness. For Derrida, the very condition of decision and invention, called for by the Other, is an impossible one. The best invention is an impossible one. As Beardsworth explains "[I]mpossible [...] in a very specific sense: an impossible invention is not a horizon. There can be no temporal horizon to the passage of time. The impossible is 'now'. 'Now' marks the impossibility of concentrating time into a present; 'now' is the fact that time, to be time, is constantly 'out of joint' – it is the disjointure (*Un-Fug*) of the future anterior. Given the recurrent impossibility of now, the alterity of any invention or institution is what has always to be negotiated. The other of institution is in this sense the 'now' of an absolute future, a non-eschatological 'promise' – literally the ever-recurrent promise of the non-adequation of the present to itself" (Beardsworth, 1996: 101). Like Critchley earlier, for Beardsworth, this means that the 'now' is the condition of possibility for the invention of the Other, the recognition that this 'now' of messianic eschatology allows for a refiguration of politics indicating that 'political inventions [...] could be rewritten' (Beardsworth, 1996: 102). The poetics of the impossible, opened up by a writing in blindness, then, does not deny the oppressions of the real world. Rather, the poetics of the impossible, by seeking to imagine differently, is compelled by a desire to re-create and re-think the conditions of possibilities, which is an expression of the freedom of human being as possibility to be-come otherwise.

A practice of eschatological desire, one compelled by messianic eschatology, is signaled by an openness to the Beyond, unthinkable in advance, to a singularity that cannot be determined or anticipated. A messianic eschatology is the promise and unconditional hospitality held out to the Other to-come and this promise

> will always keep within it, and it must do so, this absolutely undetermined messianic hope at its heart, this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event *and* of singularity, of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. Awaiting without the horizon of the wait, awaiting what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve, welcoming salutation accorded in advance to the absolute surprise of the *arrivant* (Derrida, 1994: 74).

To return to the disposition required of a writing in the dark, underpinning the practices of the invisible is an eschatological desire which is co-relational to an unconditional hospitality. For Derrida, if it is to be pure, hospitality can never be restricted by conditions. As soon as we put certain conditions or criteria in place, the openness of hospitality becomes particular or determinate in character. As soon as we discriminate or find a criteria of distinguishing between friend and foe, we also risk limiting or closing down unconditional hospitality. The hospitality underpinning eschatological desire means an openness to the advent (*invention*) of the wholly other (*toute autre*) to come.

Some would argue that this openness to forms of Otherness would still require political and ethical decisions to be made. But as I have already asked in Chapter 4, would not these problematic questions also spell the tension inherent in the necessity of producing criteria, of discriminating, of filtering, of inventing politics? Would not this, then, also raise the necessity of negotiations? Of the negotiation between non-knowing, indeterminacy and the necessity of keeping open to the singularity of the Other to come? So, a decision is necessary. But, as was signaled in Chapter 4, this is not decisionism, not the application of a universal programme. To reiterate, for a decision to be responsible and just, it must be for the Other(s). If it were simply ours, the application of a blue-print, of calculability, it is not a responsible decision. However, the necessity of decision does compel and require a negotiation. The thought of Derrida, from which this present work takes its cue, seeks to inhabit this tension between the necessities of making a decision, of negotiating while at the same time questioning the limitations of our negotiations. So, a decision that is compelled also demands an act of radical responsibility in a singular situation in which 'I' or 'We' cannot excuse ourselves by saying that 'I' or 'We' are simply conforming to what the rules require. What is entailed by the politics of the undecidable is an incessant daily negotiation in the absence of formalizable rules of engagement with the Other. And a writing in blindness, understood as an eschatological desire and openness for Otherness, is at odds with a conservative politics that attempts to naturalize the status quo. As was also signaled in Chapter 3, underpinning the apophaticism of poetics is that of a desire for a be-coming otherwise. As an ethics of the (im)possible, the apophaticism of poetics is also conditioned by the desire to imagine the Other differently, to approach the Other

differently, of imaging ourselves differently and otherwise: 'it is, in itself, an ethical gesture of welcoming what is different' (Kearney, 1995: xvi). In terms of envisioning justice to come, the productivity of poetics is thus compelled by the desire to be otherwise without recourse to pre-ordained systems and pre-established rules. Indeed, as Kearney also clarifies the productivity of poetics is thus 'never simply a matter of conforming to a given law. It involves a responsibility to listen to other narratives (in the sense of alternative narratives and narratives of others)' (Kearney, 1998: 210).

Thus, the deconstructive thought compelling a poetics of the (im)possible and the eschatological desire of night-writing is suggestive of an optimistic version of *Waiting for Godot.* As a form of night-writing, the poetics of the impossible is co-relational to a faith in the 'perhaps' and the possibility of the Other to-come. This affirmative tone adopted to the advent of Otherness to come is crucial and relevant to transformative politics. As was discussed already in Chapter 4, a feminism aligned with the deconstructive impulse is crucial for feminists. Of course, feminist theorists have every right to be suspicious and critical of the 'utopian' impulse especially if this were another example of homogenizing thought, and particularly if this meant disregarding the present situation of gender, racial and ethnic oppressions. But, by denying the affirmation of Otherness, as feminists we stand to lose much if we give up hope in the wholly other to come. This would deprive feminism of its dream of the Otherwise, and thus depoliticize feminist politics at a stroke. Without a political vision and the dream for the otherwise to sustain it, the transformative potential of feminist politics can easily become lost when we are unaware of the promise extended by the wholly other that is the advent of a transformative politics. As Cornell suggests, the utopian impulse, as a thinking at the limit 'demands the continual exploration and re-exploration of the possible and yet also the unrepresentable [...] Without utopian thinking [...] feminism is inevitably ensnared in the system of gender identity that devalues the feminine' (Cornell, 1991: 169).

A practice of the invisible, a writing in the dark wants to believe, wants to have faith in the possibility of re-imagining the Other(s) differently, in the possibility of be-coming-otherwise. In short, faith accompanies the apophaticism of poetics. This faith, required by a writing in blindness and construed as a desire to keep open to

Otherness, is that of striving, of the search for better approximations, for an infinite amelioration of politics, repoliticization and the endless betterment of existing democracy: '[W]e act, but we act with a heightened sense of the delimitations of subjectivity, not sure of this "we" or who or what acts or what deeper impulses are at work. We act with fear and trembling, with a deep sense of *ebranler*, whose tremors are all around us' (Kearney, 1998: 228). As Derrida also suggests, underlying messianic eschatology is that of faith, accompanied by

> [A]n invincible desire for justice [and which] is linked to this expectation [...] This abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that 'founds' all relation to the other in testimony. This justice, which I distinguish from right, alone allows the hope, beyond all 'messianicisms', of a universalizable culture of singularities [...] This justice inscribes itself in advance in the promise, in the act of faith or in the appeal to faith that inhabits every act of language and every address to the other [...] This messianicity, stripped of everything, as it should, this faith without dogma which makes its way through the risks of absolute night, cannot be contained in any traditional opposition, for example that between reason and mysticism (Derrida, 1998: 18).

This faith is thus another positive aspect of a writing in blindness and emerges from the dissatisfaction with the logocentric and sovereign politics of presence underpinning the practices of the visible. This motif, that of faith, is that which conditions the advent of the Other (*l'inventions de l'autre*) but this faith is not construed by a determinative and concrete messianicity. As Derrida explains in a discussion with Caputo:

> You cannot address the other, speak to the Other, without an act of faith, without testimony. What are you doing when you attest to something? You address the Other and ask, 'believe me'. Even if you are lying, even in a perjury, you are addressing the Other and asking the Other to trust you. This 'trust me, I am speaking to you' is of the order of faith, a faith that cannot be reduced to a theoretical statement, to a determinative judgment; it is the opening of the address to the other. So this faith is not

> religious, strictly speaking; at least it cannot be totally determined by a given religion (Caputo, 1997: 22).

As a non-totalizing disposition to Otherness, eschatological desire goes beyond the desire to know, to be and to see absolutely: '[T]o go toward the absolutely other' Derrida asks, 'isn't that the extreme tension of a desire that tries thereby to renounce its own proper momentum [...] of appropriation?' (Derrida, 1993a: 37). This messianic disposition, that of alertness and vigilance set to work by the aporetic tensions within an undecidability, thus moves away from the onto-theological desire for original causes and first foundations, and the desire to know and to be absolutely. As Derrida indicates in *Memoirs of the Blind*, 'I', 'We' write to the extent that we exceed visibility. We always write in the dark. As a writing in blindness, the eschatological desire is compelled by the urge to defend infinity against the totality.

*

If a politics of the visible is construed as a political management and securing of Otherness, the securing of unconditioned certainty and cognition, then what is the otherwise of this form of politics? What is the invisible Other of this form of politics but that which calls for a radical relation to the radically non-relational. This otherwise of the politics of the visible, then, takes the form of an eschatological desire – a radical openness and hospitality toward Otherness. Compelling this eschatological desire is a writing in blindness, entailing an openness to the realm of possibilities and potentialities, a being in the world understood as possibility. Precisely because it dwells in and grapples with the realm of possibilities, a writing in the dark is as tentative as it is fragile, even while it is motivated by a re-thinking of possible variations of being in the world. At the same time, because a writing in blindness liberates us from the metaphysical absolutes of visibility politics, it re-creates and re-thinks the conditions of possibilities, which is an expression of the freedom of human-being, a being-of-possibility of be-coming otherwise.

Bibliography

Agamben, G. (1998) *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Ahmad, A. (1995) 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality', *Race and Class*, 36 (3): 1-7.

Alatas, A. (1977) *The Myth of the Laze Malay*, London: Frank Cass.

Ang, I. and Stratton, J. (1995) 'The Singaporean Way of Multiculturalism', *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 9 (1): 65-89.

Ang, I. and Stratton, J. (1995a) 'Straddling East and West' in *Asian and Pacific Inscriptions: Identities, Ethnicities, Nationalities*, (ed) Suvendrini Perera, Meridian: La Trobe University Press.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G. and Tiffin, H. (1989) *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge.

Badiou, A. (2001) *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward, London: Verso.

Ballou, Maturin M. (1903) *Foot-Prints of Travel or, Journeying in Many Lands*, Boston: Ginn & Company.

Bastin, J. (1969) *Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles: With an Account of the Raffles-Minto Manuscript Collection Presented to the India Office Library on 17 July 1969 by the Malaysia-Singapore Commercial Association*, Liverpool: The Ocean Steam Ship Company Limited.

Batchen, G. (1999) *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Beardsworth, R. (1996) *Derrida and the Political*, London: Routledge.

Berlant, L. (1994) '68, or something', *Critical Inquiry*, 21(1): 124-155.

Benhabib, S. (1992) *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. (1986) 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon – Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition', in F. Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles L. Markmann, London: Pluto Press.

Bhabha, H. (1990) (ed.) *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. (1990a) 'The Third Space' in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford, London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Bhabha, H. (1997) *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.

Bhabha, H. (2000) 'Culture's In-Between' in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, (eds) Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, London: Sage.

Bharucha, R. (1993) *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, London: Routledge.

Bharucha, R. (1997) 'Negotiating the "River": Intercultural Interactions and Interventions', *The Drama Review* 41 (3): 31-38.

Bharucha, R. (2000) *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalisation*, London: Athlone.

Bharucha, R. (2000) *Consumed in Singapore: The Intercultural Spectacle of Lear*, Centre for Advanced Studies, National University of Singapore: Singapore.

Burke, P. (1990) 'Listening at the Abyss' in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty* (eds) Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Buruma, I. (1999) 'The Man Who Would be King' *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 46 (10), June10.

Butler, J. (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Butler, J. (2001) 'Giving An Account of Oneself' in *Diacritics* 31(4): 22-40.

Campbell, D. and Dillon, M. (1993) (eds) *The Political Subject of Violence*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Campbell, D. (1998) *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Caputo, J. (1987) *Radical Hermeneutics*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. (1988) 'Demythologising Heidegger: *Aletheia* and the History of Being' *Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 41 (March): 519-546.

Caputo, J. (1993) *Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Caputo, J. (1997) *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, edited and with a commentary by John D. Caputo, New York:

Fordham University Press.

Chrisman, L. and Williams, P. (1993) (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Chin, D. (1991) 'Interculturalism, Postmodernism, Pluralism' in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from PAJ*, (ed) Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta, New York: PAJ Publications.

Chow, R. (1998) *Ethics After Idealism: Theory–Culture–Ethnicity–Reading*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Chua, Beng-Huat (1998) 'Racial Singaporeans: Absence after the Hyphen' in *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, (ed) Joel S. Kahn, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Chua, Beng-Huat (2000) 'Consuming Asians: Ideas and Issues' in *Consumption in Asia* (ed) Chua Beng-Huat, London: Routledge.

Chua, Beng-Huat (2000a) "Singaporeans Ingesting McDonalds'" in *Consumption in Asia* (ed) Chua Beng-Huat, London: Routledge.

Cixous, H. and Clement, C. (1986) *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cixous, H. (1993) *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Copjec, J. (1986) 'Sexual Difference' *Oxford Literary Review* (14): 59-65.

Cornell, D. (1991) *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical feminism, deconstruction, and the law*, NY: Routledge.

Cornell, D. (1992) *The Philosophy of the Limit*, London: Routledge.

Cornell, D. (1993) *Transformations: Recollective Imagination and Sexual Difference*, London: Routledge.

Cornell, D. (1997) 'Where Love Begins: Sexual Difference and the Limit of the Masculine Symbolic' in *Derrida and Feminism: Recasting the Question of Woman*, (ed.) Ellen K. Feder, Mary C. Rawlinson, and Emily Zakin, London: Routledge.

Cornell, D. (1998) *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, sex and equality*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Crawfurd, J. (1820) *History of the Indian Archipelago*, Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Co.

Creed, B. (1993) *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, New York: Routledge.

Critchley, S. (1992) *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Critchley, S. (1993) 'Re-tracing the political: politics and community in the work of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy' in *The Political Subject of Violence* (eds) Campbell, D. and Dillon, M., Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Critchley, S. (1999) *Ethics–Politics–Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*, London: Verso.

Critchley, S. (2000) 'Remarks on Derrida and Habermas' in *Constellations* 7 (4): 455-465.

Critchley, S. (2004) 'Five Problems in Levinas' View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to them', *Political Theory* 32 (2): 172-185.

Culler, J. (1998) *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, London: Routledge.

de Certeau, M. (1986) *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

de Man, Paul, (1979) *Allegories of Reading*, London: Yale University Press.

Derrida, J. (1973) *Speech and Phenomenon and Other Essays on Husserl's theory of Signs*, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Pres.

Derrida, J. (1978) *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles/ Eperons*, trans. B. Harlow, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Derrida, J. (1978a) *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, London: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1979) 'Living On', in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, trans. James Hulbert, ed.Harold Bloom *et al*, New York: Seabury Press.

Derrida, J. (1981) 'Economimesis', *Diacritics* 11(2): 3-25.

Derrida, J. (1981) *Positions*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Derrida, J. (1982) *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (1983) 'The Principle of Reason: The University in the Eyes of the Pupils', *Diacritics* 13 (3): 3-20.

Derrida, J. (1984) 'Deconstruction and the Other', Interview in R. Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Derrida, J. (1984a) *Signeponge/ Signsponge*, trans. R. Rand, New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1985) *Difference in Translation*, ed. J. F. Graham, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Derrida, J. (1985a) *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, ed. Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf, New York: Schocken.

Derrida, J. (1986) *Memoirs: For Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathon Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf, New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1986a) *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Derrida, J. (1986b) 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (1991) 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf, New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, J. (1991a) *Cinders*, trans. N. Lukacher, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Derrida, J. (1991b) *Given Time, I: Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Derrida, J. (1992) 'Before the Law', in *Acts of Literature*, trans. Avital Ronnell and Christine Roulston, ed. Derek Attridge, London: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1992a) "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority" in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, (eds) D. G. Carlson, D. Cornell and M. Rosenfeld, New York: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1992b) *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Derrida, J. (1992c) 'Post-scriptum: Aporias, Ways, and Voices' in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, (eds) Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Derrida, J. (1992d) 'Of an Apocalyptic Tone Newly Adopted in Philosophy' in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, (eds) Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Derrida, J. (1993) *Aporias*, trans. T. Dutoit, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1993a) *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*, trans.

Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International,* trans. Peggy Kamuf, London: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1995) *Points ...Interviews, 1974-1994*, (ed) E. Weber, trans. P. Kamuf and others, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1995a) 'Choreographies' in *Points....Interviews, 1974-1994*, (ed) E. Weber, trans. P. Kamuf and others, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1995b) 'Deconstruction and the Other' in R. Kearney, *States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers*, New York: New York University Press.

Derrida, J. (1995b) *The Gift of Death*, 1995: 86, trans. David Wills, Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Derrida, J. (1995c) *On the Name*, ed. and trans. by T. Dutoit, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1997) *The Politics of Friendship*, London: Verso.

Derrida, J. (1997a) *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Derrida, J. (1997b) 'The Villanova Roundtable: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida' in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, edited and with a commentary by John D. Caputo, New York: Fordham University Press.

Derrida, J. (1998) "Faith and Knowledge: the Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone" in *Religion* (eds.) Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Derrida, J. (1998a) *Monolingualism of the Other, or the Prosthesis of Origin*, trans. Patrick Mensah, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Derrida, J. (1999) 'Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida' in *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy*, (ed.) Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley, London: Routledge.

Dillon, G. M. (1990-91) 'The Alliance of Security and Subjectivity' in *Current Research on Peace and Violence III*, ed. P. Joenniemi, Tempere: Finland.

Dillon, M. (1996) *Politics of Security: Towards a political philosophy of continental thought*, London: Routledge.

Dillon, M. (1999) 'The Sovereign and the Stranger' in *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*, (eds) J. Edkins, N. Persram and V. Pin-Fat, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Dillon, M. (2000) 'Poststructuralism, Complexity and Poetics' in *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 17 (5): 1–26.

Dollimore, J. (1991) *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, Oxford: Clarendon.

Dolven, B. (2000) 'Reinventing Desdemona' *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 16.

Doane, M. A. (1991) *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, London: Routledge.

Doty, Roxanne (1996) 'The Double Writing of Statecraft: exploring state responses to illegal immigration', *Alternatives* 21(2): 171-189.

Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P. (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, with an afterword by Michel Foucault*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Earl, George W. (1937) *The Eastern Seas*, London: W.H. Allen.

Elden, S. (1997) 'What about Huddersfield?', *Radical Philosophy* (84): 47-48.

Elden, S. (2001) 'Politics, Philosophy, Geography: Henri Lefebvre in recent Anglo-American Scholarship' in *Antipode* Vol. 133 (Nov): 809-825.

Elden, S. (2001a) *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, London: Athlone.

Falconer, J. (1987) *A Vision of the Past: A History of Early Photography in Singapore and Malaya, The Photographs of G. R. Lambert & Co., 1880 – 1910*, ed. G. Liu, Singapore: Times Editions.

Fanon, F. (1986) *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. C. L. Markmann, London: Pluto Press.

Fanon, F. (1990) *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1975) *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (ed) C. Gordon, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf Press.

Foucault, M. (1980a) 'Questions of Geography' in Gordon, C. (ed) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf Press.

Foucault, M. (1986) 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* (16): 22-27.

Foucault, M. (1988) '*The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom*' in J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen (eds) *The Final Foucault*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Foucault, M. (1991) 'Space, Knowledge, and Power' in P. Rabinow, (ed) *The Foucault Reader*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1992) *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1992a) *The Order of Things*, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1994) *Dits et ecrits 1954-1988*, (eds) Daniel Defert and Francois, Ewald, Paris: Gallimard.

Foucault, M. (1996) *Foucault Live: Interviews 1961-1984,* S. Lotringer, (ed), New York: Semiotext(e).

Foucault, M. (1998) 'Different Spaces' in J. D. Faubion, (ed) *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology 1954-1984*, London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (1998a) *The History of Sexuality: 1*, London: Penguin Books.

Freud, S. (1974) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 2, London: Penguin.

Gates, Jr., Henry Louis (1991) 'Critical Fanonism' *Critical Inquiry* 17: 457-478.

Gregory, D. (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Grehan, H. (2001) 'TheatreWorks' *Desdemona*: Fusing Technology and Tradition', *The Drama Review* 45 (3): 113-125.

Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Grosz, E. (1995) *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, London: Routledge.

Grosz, E. (1998) 'Bodies-Cities' in H.J. Nast and S. Pile (eds) *Places Through the Body*, London: Routledge.

Grove, R. H. (1995) *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600 – 1860*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, S. (1990) 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, (ed) J. Rutherford, London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hall, S. (1996) 'The After-Life of Frantz Fanon: Why Fanon? Why Black Skin, White Masks?' in Alan Read (ed), The Fact of Blackness. Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Hamacher, W. (1999) 'Lingua Amissa: The Messianism of Commodity-Language and Derrida's *Specters of Marx*' in *Ghostly Demarcations: Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. and introduced by Michael Sprinker, London: Verso.

Hand, S. (1989) 'Introduction' in E. Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, (ed) Sean Hand, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Haraway, D. (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York: Routledge.

Heidegger, M. (1961) *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New York: Doubleday & Company.

Heidegger, M. (1975) 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper and Row.

Heidegger, M. (1975a) 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter, New York: Harper and Row.

Heidegger, M. (1981) *Nietzsche. Volume 1: The Will to Power as Art*, trans. D. F. Krell, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

hooks, B. (1990) *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, Boston: South End Press.

JanMohammed, A. R. (1985) 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry* (12): 59-87.

Jay, M. (1986) 'In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought' in Hoy, D.C. (ed) *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Jay, M. (1994) *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Johnson, C. (1993) *System and Writing in the philosophy of Jacques Derrida*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Josey, A. (1968) *Lee Kuan Yew*, Singapore: Donald Moore Press.

Kahn, J. S. (1998) 'Southeast Asian Identities' in *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, (ed) Joel S. Kahn, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Kaplan, A. (1997) *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, London: Routledge.

Kearney , R. (1995) *Poetics of Modernity: Toward a Hermeneutic Imagination*, New

Jersey: Humanities Press.

Kearney. R. (1998) *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Post-modern*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Kearney, R. (2001) *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*, Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press.

Keenan, T. (1997) *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Krauss, R. (1985) *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Lacan, J. (1973) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Harmondsworth: Peregrine Books.

Lacan, J. (1993) *The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses, 1955-6*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed), trans. Russell Grigg, London: Routledge.

Lacan, J. (1997) *Ecrits: A Selection*, London: Routledge.

Lee, Weng Choy (2000) 'Othello Gazes: Desdemona and the unity of spectacle' in *Desdemona Program notes. Telstra Adelaide Program Notes*, courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

Lefebvre, H. (1976) *The Survival of Capitalism*, trans. F. Bryant, London: Allison and Busby

Lefebvre, H. (1976a) 'Reflections on the Politics of Space', trans. M. J. Enders, in *Antipode* (8): 30-37.

Lefebvre, H. (2000) *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell.

Lefort, C. (1990) 'Flesh and Otherness' in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, (eds) Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Levin, D. M. (1990) 'Justice in the Flesh' in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, (eds) Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Levinas, E. (1989) 'Ideology and Idealism' in E. Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Levinas, E. (1989a) 'Ethics as first philosophy' in E. Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Levinas, E. (1990) 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', trans. S. Hand,

Critical Inquiry (17): 63-71.

Levinas, E. (1994) 'On Intersubjectivity: Notes on Merleau-Ponty' in E. Levinas *Outside the Subject*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Levinas, E. (1994a) 'Desire for the Invisible' in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press.

Levinas, E. (1999) *Otherwise Than Being Or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.

Macherey, P. (1978) *A Theory of Literary Production*, New York: Routledge.

Madison, G. B. (1990) 'Flesh and Otherness' in *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*, (eds) Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Manning, E. (2004) 'Time for Politics' in J. Edkins, V. Pin-Fat and M. Shapiro (eds) *Sovereign Lives: Power in Global Politics*, New York: Routledge.

Maxwell, A. (1999) *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the 'Native' People and the Making of European Identities*, London: Leicester University Press.

Mendieta, E. (2001) 'The City and the Philosopher: on the urbanism of phenomenology', *Philosophy and Geography*, vol. 4 (2): 203-218.

Mercer, K. (1995) 'Busy in the ruins of wretched phantasia' in R. Farr (ed) *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire*, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts/Institute of International Visual Culture.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968) *The Visible and The Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) *The Primacy of Perception*, (ed) James M. Edie, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.

Miller, J. Hillis (1979) 'The Critic as Host', in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom *et al*, London: Routledge.

Miller, J. Hillis (1987) *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Elliot, Trollope, James and Benjamin*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Miller, J. Hillis (1990) *Hawthorne and History: Defacing it*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Ministry of Culture, Singapore (1984) *Singapore 1984*, Singapore: Information Division, Ministry of Culture.

Moi, T. (1993) 'Beauvoir's Utopia: The politics of the second sex', *The South Atlantic*

Quarterly 92 (spring): 311-61.

Mouffe, C. (1993) *The Return of the Political*, London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. (1995) 'Post-Marxism: democracy and identity', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, (13): 259-265.

Murphet, J. (1999) 'Grounding Theory: Literary Theory and the New Geography' in McQuillan, M., Macdonald, G., Purves, R. and Thomson, S. (eds) *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Nancy, Jean-Luc (1993) *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. B. McDonald, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Nancy, Jean-Luc (1996) *The Inoperative Community*, trans. P. Connor, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Nayar, P. (2000) 'A Complex piece of performance art' *The Business Times*, June 5.

Ngui, M. (2000) 'Installations Artist's Message' in *Desdemona* Program Notes. *Telstra Adelaide Festival Program Notes*, courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

Norval, A. (1999) 'Hybridization: The Im/Purity of the Political' in Edkins, Persram and Pin-Fat (eds) *Sovereignty and Subjectivity*, Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner.

Ong, Keng Sen (2000) 'Director's Message' in *Desdemona* Program Notes. *Telstra Adelaide Festival Program Notes*, courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

Ong, Keng Sen (2001) 'Encounters', *The Drama Review* 45 (3): 126-133.

Oon, C. (2000) 'The Process, Not the Product', *Singapore Straits Times*, April 27.

Parry, B. (1994) 'Signs of our times: Discussion of Homi Bhabha's Location of Culture', *Third Text* 28/29 (Autumn/Winter): 5-24.

Pavis, P. (1996) (ed) *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, London: Routledge.

Peperzak, A. (1993) *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press.

Phillips, J. (1996) 'Lacan and Merleau-Ponty: The Confrontation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology' in *Disseminating Lacan* (eds) David Pettigrew and Francois Raffoul, New York: SUNY Press.

PuruShotam, N. (1998) 'Disciplining Difference: Race in Singapore' in *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, (ed) Joel S. Kahn, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Pratt, M. L. (1986) 'Scratches on the Face of the Country; or, What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushman' in *"Race", Writing, and Difference*, (ed.) Henry Louis Gates Jr., Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Phan Ming Yen (1999) 'The Language of *Lear*', *Esplanade: The Arts Magazine*, Singapore, (January/February): 12-17.

Phillips, J. (2000) 'A Completely Different Organisation of Space' in *Urban Space and Representation*, (eds) M. Balshaw and L. Kennedy, London: Pluto Press.

Quinet, A. (1995) 'The Gaze As An Object' in *Reading Seminar XI: Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (eds) Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Marie Jaanus, New York: SUNY Press.

Rajah, J. and Tay, S. (1991) 'From Second Tongue to Mother Tongue: A Look At the Use of English in Singapore English Drama From the 1960s to the Present' in *Perceiving Other Worlds*, (ed.) Edwin Thumboo, Singapore: Times Academic Press.

Robbins, J. W. (2002) 'The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the divide between philosophy and theology' in *HeyJ* (XLIII): 139–151.

Rubenstein, M.-J. (2003) 'Unknow Thyself: Apophaticism, Deconstruction, and Theology After Ontotheology' in *Modern Theology* 19:3 (July 2003): 387-417.

Said, E. (1978) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin.

Saper, C. (1991) 'A Nervous Theory: The Troubling Gaze of Psychoanalysis in Media Studies' *Diacritics* 21(4): 33-52.

Saludo, R. (1999) 'The Ultimate Asian Tragedy', *ASIAWEEK*, (February 26): 38-42.

Sharpley-Whiting, T. D. (1998) *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Shapiro, M.J. (1988) *The Politics of Representation: Writing Practices in Biography, Photography, and Policy Analysis*, London: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Schneiderman, S. (1980) *Returning to Freud: Clinical Psychoanalysis in the School of Lacan*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Sheridan, A. (1997) 'Translator's note' in Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan, London: Routledge.

Silverman, K. (1996) *The Threshold of the Visible World*, London: Routledge.

Simons, J. (1995) *Foucault and the Political*, London: Routledge.

Soja, E. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies*, London: Verso.

Soja, E. (2000) 'Thirdspace: expanding the scope of the geographical imagination' in

Read, A. (ed) *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday*, London: Routledge.

Sontag, S. (1979) *On Photography*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Spivak, G. C. (1980) 'Revolutions That As Yet Have No Model: Derrida's *Limited Inc*,' *Diacritics* Vol. 10 (4): 29-49.

Spivak, G. C. (1985) 'The Rani of Sirmur' in *Europe and Its Others* vol. 1, (eds) F. Barker *et al*, Colchester: University of Essex Press.

Spivak, G. (1990) 'Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value' in *Literary Theory Today*, (eds) P. Collier and H. Geyer-Ryan, Ithaca, New York: Cornell.

Spivak, G. (1992) 'French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics' in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (ed) Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, London: Routledge.

Spivak, G. C. (1997) Translator's Preface to *Of Grammatology*, by Jacques Derrida, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Spivak, G. C. (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, Massachusetts:

Spivak, G. (2001) 'A Moral Dilemma', in *What Happens to History: The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought*, ed. Howard Marchitello, New York: Routledge.

Spurr, D. (1993) *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration*, London: Duke University Press.

Stavrakakis, Y. (1999) *Lacan and the Political*, London: Routledge.

Stepan, N. L. (2001) *Picturing Tropical Nature*, London: Reaktion Books.

Swettenham, F. (1948) *British Malaya*, Allen and Unwin, Ltd.

TheatreWorks/ Japan Foundation Asia Centre (1997), 'The Premiere of *Lear*', Video: PAL, courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

TheatreWorks (2000) 'The Premiere of *Desdemona*', Video: Pal, courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

TheatreWorks (2000) '*Desdemona Hamburg Reviews*' translated with assistance from Goethe Institute Singapore, courtesy of TheatreWorks, Singapore.

Thomson, J. (1875) *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China and China or Ten Years Travels, Adventures and Residence Abroad,* London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle.

Threadgold, T. (1997) *Feminist Poetics: Poiesis, performance, histories*, London: Routledge.

Tiongson, Nicanor (1997) 'The Necessity of Patricide', *Esplanade: The Arts Magazine*, Singapore, (November/December): 64-66.

Trocki, C. (1990) *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800-1910*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Turnbull, C. M. (1977) *A History of Singapore 1819-1975*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press.

Turnbull, C. M. (1989) *A History of Singapore 1819 -1988*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Urry, J. (1990) *The Tourist Gaze*, London: Sage.

Wallace, A. R. (1989) *The Malay Archipelago*, London (reprint of 1869 edition).

Warren, J. (1986) *Rickshaw Coolie: A People's History of Singapore (1880-1940)*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Wee, C.J.W.-L. (1995) "Contending with Primordialism: The 'Modern' Construction of Postcolonial Singapore' in *Asian and Pacific Inscriptions: Identities, Ethnicities, Nationalities*, (ed) Suvendrini Perera, Meridian: La Trobe University Press.

Weng Choy, Lee (2000) *Monumental Statements (Artists Investigating Monuments)*, unpublished paper.

Wigley, M. (1993) *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Yeoh, B. (1996) *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Young, I. M. (1990) *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Young, R. (1990) *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West*, London: Routledge.

Young, R. (2001) *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell.